HOW TO WALK BEFORE GOD

PERE VAUBERT, S.J.

Translated by

M. S. DALTON

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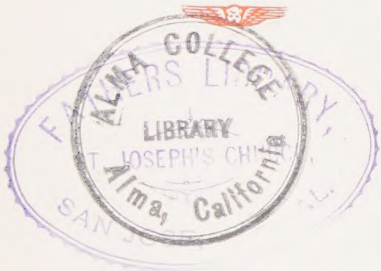
HOW TO WALK BEFORE GOD

HOW TO WALK BEFORE GOD: Being the Practice of the Divine Presence.

Translated by M. S. DALTON from the French of PÈRE VAUBERT, S.J. With a Preface by ROBERT BUTLER, D.D., O.S.C.



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PREFACE

MANY will recognise this sweet little book as an old friend. But they will be glad to read it in our own tongue, rendered so accurately and in worthy language. It is one of the rich French ascetical books of the seventeenth century, which began to circulate amongst us after the awakening of Michaelmas 1850; it came into constant use with the works of Saint Francis of Sales, the *Doctrine Spirituelle* of Père Lallemant, S.J., and the *Traité de la Vraie Dévotion à la Sainte Vierge.*

Fervent priests like Mgr. Newsham of Ushaw College and Dr. Weathers of St. Edmund's, emulated by younger men like Father Herbert Vaughan and his disciples, eagerly took up these helps to fervour. This literature had first come forth when the supposed demands of controversial defence had chilled the schools, so that the later scholastic theologians had a poor succession. Perhaps it is not too much to say that, between that period and our own, we have to look mainly to books of this class for the continuation of that vigorous and loving analysis of the treasure of revealed truth, which has fed the successive and varying groups of

the flock age after age. But the long and eventful Pontificates of Pius IX. and Leo XIII. have seen both the return of the scientific treatment of dogmatic theology all over Europe with a rapidly growing activity, and the dissemination of sacred literature, old and new, with ample appreciation.

Père Vaubert is strong in his brevity. What some of us felt, as we read and re-read him, was that we were breathing the strong air of the healthy, normal and positive teaching of all the Saints. The ever pressing "greatest and first Commandment" seemed to be made intelligible and within easy reach. The precept of praying always raised no alarm. On either side of the flowing waves of truth shallow mistakes were washed aside, allusions to error were wholly absent, and the exaggerations which beget it lost their plausibility; such as a morbid mysticism beginning and ending with self, or a cloudy contemplation of God which would prescind from the Incarnation.

The first and most pressing claim of God made Man is in His name Emmanuel, "God with us." God sought contact, close contact with us. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself." And so far as His redeemed receive Him into close contact have they power to become the sons of God. This little manual vindicates the simplicity of true religion.

It is not surprising that the solemn Carthusians of Parkminster are fond of it. Their good word is a welcome justification of our enjoyment of it, and proves its depth. But Père Vaubert is not a monk, nor is he speaking to monks. He is consoling and encouraging the upright of heart, whoever they are, who seek God; and he is claiming for hidden and genuine Christians, discerned by the eye of God in every grade and in every calling on earth, their true importance. The wisdom of such saintly Jesuit writers is methodical; but, like their seraphic founder, they pass beyond method, and are free from stiffness or narrowness. They are redolent of the most solemn mysticism, without being shadowy or vague. They are fruitful in personal earnestness, without a symptom of self-centring or morbid self-annoyance. In truth, the sense of the nearness of our Heavenly Father is where all vocations meet. "There are diversities of graces, but the same Spirit. . . . And there are diversities of operations, but the same God who worketh all in all" (1 Cor. xii.).

If our piety is to compare with that which was characteristic of the holiness of the Patriarchs, if their God is our God, and their faith the test of the quality of ours, the seed of Divine grace must strike deep roots below the surface of our lives.

England needs the strong theological

teaching of this master. Within as well as without the Catholic fold we are in danger of poor pastures, even when wolves are not besetting us.

Holy Church has no fear of even expressly testifying to the possibility of souls, faultlessly living in a state of privation of the external means of grace, growing in holiness by her unseen far-spreading life, upon apparently only crumbs of the bread of sound doctrine. They may even put to shame the children of the Church, when we eat day by day the Bread of Life and show so little growth. They have perhaps no trustworthy teacher on earth, but for that reason turn their ear with greater docility and humble fidelity to the Gospel of Emmanuel, "opening His mouth" to teach men, recalling them as they sit around Him on the mountain to their God, or rather, as He says no less than sixteen times, their Father. If such a habit becomes a second nature, God is not a respecter of persons. He knows such souls as His own. Holy Church calls them her soul And at the last reaping of the harvest theirs will be a safe corporate reunion into the one eternal fold.

R. BUTLER.

St. Charles' College,
Feast of St. Charles, 1900.

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HOW TO WALK BEFORE GOD

Being the Practice of the Divine Presence

BOOK I

CHAPTER I

That God is Present Everywhere.

GOD is present everywhere. He is in heaven, on the throne of His glory, where He is the sole joy of the blessed. He is on earth, not only in His intimate knowledge of the course of earthly events; nor only as the sun which permeates it with his light and heat; nor yet, as some have falsely taught, as a sovereign whose power and influence extend throughout the length and breadth of his kingdom by his laws and in the persons of those who govern as his representatives. The relation of God to His creation is more intimate than this.

He is immanent in the universe, filling it

with His own essence. He maintains it in being; He is Himself its law; He is within it not only by His wisdom and might, but by His real indwelling presence.

Many Christians never aspire to the practice of the deep truths of religion; they act in all the circumstances of their lives as though God saw them not; their minds are never fixed on the revealed truth that He is everywhere present; and this because although in their infancy they are taught the fact, it is learnt but as a lesson, repeated by rote, and soon unconsciously forgotten.

The Holy Ghost, speaking by the mouth of the prophet Jeremias, tells us that God fills heaven and earth[1]; and because His vastness can know no limits, it follows certainly that the being of God is infinitely present in every created being; and that between Himself and His creatures there is no separation.

He contains us within Himself, He surrounds us, He fills us, He is closer to us than we are to ourselves; we are within Him, we live in Him; all that we do, we do within Him; wherefore the great Apostle teaches us that He is not far from every one of us, for in Him we live, and move, and are.[2]

[1] Jer. xxiii. 24. [2] Acts xvii. 28.

Alas, how slow are men to grasp this glorious truth. Well might the reproach of John the Baptist to the Jews be applied to many Christians: "There hath stood one in the midst of you, whom you know not—,"[1] One Whose adorable presence you ignore and forget.

Let us then cry humbly with the blind beggar of the Gospel, "Lord, that I may see."[2] Let us say with the psalmist, "Whither shall I go from Thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from Thy Face? If I ascend into heaven, Thou art there; if I descend into hell Thou art present."[3]

For as the birds are ever encompassed by the air through which they fly, and as the water surrounds the fishes that swim within it, so shall we find God everywhere, go where we may; for, as Saint Augustine says, within our inmost recesses He shall be closer to us than we are to our own hearts.

[1] John i. 26. [2] Luke xviii. 41.
[3] Ps. cxxxviii. 7, 8.

CHAPTER II

That God, Who is Present everywhere, is everywhere the Same as He is in Himself.

GOD, having not parts, cannot be severed nor divided, and must everywhere exist in wholeness and entirety, unless He exist not at all. If, then, He exist entire in every place, it is in the fulness of His Divine perfections; He is one and the same in the smallest grain of sand, in the height of heaven and throughout the world. Therefore does His supreme and adorable Majesty demand in every place our undivided homage; His glories call forth our praises, His omnipotence our reverence. His beauty rivets our gaze, His goodness draws our hearts to His love; we trust in His mercy, we give thanks for His generosity, we fear His justice; and we can do no less than com-

mend ourselves, our hopes, our all, without reserve into the fatherly Hands of His boundless charity and infinite wisdom.

For if God has revealed Himself not only as our Father, but as a Father Whose tenderness surpasses all love of earthly parents, shall we not find rest to our souls beneath His tender care? He is a Father ever swift to show mercy, ever ready to forget our faults when we truly repent, ever prompt to care for our needs. He heaps blessings upon those who fear Him; the sacred Scripture tells us that His wings are over them as an eagle protects her young; He bears them upon His shoulders, and verily carries them in His bosom as a mother her child; He has graven them upon the palms of His hands.[1] Never shall they be forgotten of Him, Who will bless them with innumerable benedictions and watch over them with untiring faithfulness: numbering the very hairs of their heads.[2]

How great happiness would be ours were our eyes opened, our spiritual vision quickened to behold these wonders. For then by the supernatural gift of faith we should be enabled to contemplate the Three Persons in the Blessed Trinity in the fulness of Their supreme

[1] Isa. xlix. 16. [2] Luke xii. 7.

glory and divine perfections, present in every place, and most especially within ourselves.

Then would earth become a Paradise; in the midst of danger and in the strangest tangles of circumstance our peace would be secure, our confidence unshaken; a fountain of joy and consolation would spring up within us; for we should know ourselves to be compassed round by the power and goodness of God, Who is supreme over every creature, and stronger than death or hell.

CHAPTER III

That God, who is Present everywhere, requires that His Divine Presence be held in Remembrance at all times and in all places.

Is it not characteristic of things noble and beautiful, that in proportion to their excellence they so attract the eyes and capture the mind that to turn away from them needs a supreme effort?

But, if this be so, how comes it that men make so little account of the presence of God, before Whose loveliness the highest created beauty pales?

The vision of God will be the eternal bliss of heaven; how can it be that here below He is forgotten and ignored; that though He is in the world, His presence therein is not discerned?

O unaccountable blindness of man, that he should walk with eyes fixed on earth, seeking his sole satisfaction from the creature! God

alone is nothing to him ; he beholds Him not, though He be very close to every one of us ; neither does he cast a thought towards Him, but acts in all things as though nothing depended upon God, as though man were sufficient for himself.

The seraphic Saint whose ardour of contemplation won for him so high a title, being steeped in the sense of God's greatness, expressed himself as filled with shame on finding that his thoughts could again turn towards creatures after he had seen the highest created being to be dust and nothingness in the presence of the divine adorable Majesty ; and it was to him a source of yet keener self-reproach to realise in himself a recurring liability to set his affections on earthly things.

Yet are not the minds of most men occupied almost entirely with worldly concerns ; their houses, gardens, grounds ; their furniture, stables, clothes ; their promotions, their amusements, and every other worldly good ? It seemed to Saint Augustine that mankind had become, as he says, but earthly and fleshly, with no thought beyond his carnal vision.

Alas ! man spends his life oblivious of an ever-present God to Whom alone he should look for happiness, on Whom his every thought

should be centred, Who has sole claim to the undivided affections of his heart. How strange, how sad that corruption by which he has been turned aside from the first duty of his being, to be enslaved by things material. How vile the triumph of his fleshly nature that has dragged him down below the level of the brutes, making him of all the animal creation the most miserable and the most contemptible.

Is it surprising that reflections such as these should move the soul to a love of solitude?

For how should not the undisturbed contemplation of the blessed Presence of the Three Divine Persons be sweeter than the most congenial earthly society, which is for the most part destitute of one spiritual intuition? Was not this the secret of that attraction which peopled the deserts with holy hermits and filled the monasteries? God was their society, their wealth, their recreation; the hidden Source of a peace and security that the world wots not of; their earthly pilgrimage was a foretaste of heaven, their life the life of angels.

Let none, then, complain of solitude. For if religious souls will meditate on these deep truths, their enclosure will no more be distasteful to them, but rather one of their chief sources of happiness.

So, too, poor and lonely souls will find in this their greatest consolation, that they possess the three Divine Persons in Whom is all the joy of heaven.

Truly, if we knew the gift of God, how deeply should we realise that they who possess the Creator have no need of the creature. Did we know the greatness of the honour granted to us in being allowed to hold communication with the supreme divine Majesty, how diligently should we not strive to realise so great a good.

A soul whom God has enlightened knows well that a life of toil and suffering would be as nothing if thereby so great a favour as that of intercourse with Him could be obtained but for one instant. This inestimable privilege may be ours at any moment, and we deem it beneath our notice.

Alas for the hardness of our hearts. Alas for the darkened vision of the world that casts not a glance upon God's supreme Majesty everywhere present; to whom the thought of Him is weariness, to hear Him spoken of is tedium and irritation; a world that chooses the basest interests, the least and lowest pleasures in preference to Him.

Whence comes a blindness so deplorable

but that the human spirit is held to earth by the attraction of material things, and that the eyes of the soul are so dimmed by sin that they cannot see the divine light, nor discern things spiritual?

Blessed indeed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God. To them He manifests Himself in love unspeakable; and in this manifestation lies the communicated virtue of the divine Presence.

Certain is it, then, that through purity of heart we may best hope to achieve the possession of so great a gift; for though it is true that those who earnestly seek God shall find Him, and therefore true also that those who but intermittently set themselves to learn the secret of His presence shall of His goodness attain gradually to the blessed habit of recollection, yet is His revelation of Himself quite other to those who serve Him in the entire surrender of themselves, renouncing the world and worldly things.

To such as these He manifests Himself in a closer embrace, and gives to them an abundant measure of grace to walk without hindrance or hesitation in the light of His presence.

CHAPTER IV

That God, being everywhere Present, requires of us everywhere both interior and exterior Reverence.

If we would learn what is the homage due from us to the presence of God's supreme greatness, let us consider the example of Jesus Christ, our divine Model. He Who is very God, in all things equal to His Father, wills as it were to annihilate Himself and to bring Himself to nothing upon every Altar, for the reverence that He would show to the Father's infinite Majesty.

How then shall it be with us, who are but creatures, yea, dust and nothingness? Shall we find it hard to humble ourselves? Shall we not rather seek out humiliations, that we may be able to abase ourselves as we ought? Surely it is no marvel that the Saints should

have lived in the perpetual spirit of sacrifice, ever offering themselves willing victims before the Majesty of God, in the mortification of their passions, their wills, their intellects, their pleasures, and every sense; withdrawing themselves wholly from the gaze of men, shunning human esteem and human love: using every conceivable means whereby to hide themselves and be accounted least and lowest. For overwhelming would have been their sense of guilt had they suffered but one iota of God's inheritance in them to be shared by self, or given to another.

This, then, is the interior reverence due to the presence of God,—that self should be entirely obliterated; that our lives should be the perpetual offering to Him of all our relations to creatures, active or passive, actual or possible.

When self is thus annihilated, so that the eyes are no longer riveted on it, God only is discerned in every place; and when His supreme Majesty is manifested to the soul, it responds to His lightest inspiration; the heart is expanded by love, the rough ways are made plain, and swiftly and easily the soul mounts the steep and difficult way of

perfection. "I have run the way of Thy commandments when Thou didst enlarge my heart."[1]

And more than this. Not only is virtue practised, but it is practised with immunity from those imperfections which mar so many good actions and despoil them of their merit, when all the while, through the subtle influence of self-love, we imagine ourselves to have made great progress, and are tempted to self-satisfaction and presumption.

Again, through the realisation of God's presence, the commonest actions are sanctified. We eat and drink and take our sleep and needful recreation to the glory of God; and our lives as Christians are always consistent, because they never fall away from their supernatural guiding principle.

We are enabled to realise the degree of exterior reverence demanded of us by the Presence of God, when we remember that He always sees us and takes minute account of all our actions. If the great men of the day, who are as nothing before God, command our instant respect when we enter their presence; if on the appearance of an important personage there is a sudden lull in conversation

[1] Ps. cxviii. 32.

and laughter, an immediate carefulness in general behaviour, can there be any time or any place where even our exterior conduct should not be recollected, since God is more present than our very selves in every place where we are? For this reason the great Apostle says: "Let your modesty be known to all men; the Lord is nigh."[1]

The illustrious bishop of Bellay, who secretly watched Saint Francis of Sales that he might observe his ways when he believed himself alone, records of the Saint that he was always perfectly recollected and restrained: for he was indeed perpetually conscious of God's presence. And is not such a habit of recollection binding on all Christians?

They should therefore guard themselves with the utmost care, cherishing within them the spirit of faith, and using their reason as subject to God, guided and enlightened by the Holy Ghost; remembering that the human reason is re-created by grace and by that supernatural faith which enlightens the "new man, who, according to God, is created in justice and holiness of truth";[2] that is to say, set apart from things temporal and consecrated to the service of God. For, as the Apostle says,

[1] Philipp. iv. 5. [2] Ephes. iv. 24.

they must "walk as children of light"[1] and not as children of darkness, whose miserable blindness springs from ignorance of spiritual things, and from neglect of the Presence of God.

Our Divine Lord has said: "Every one that doth evil hateth the light, and cometh not to the light, that his works may not be reproved";[2] he fears the light, lest it make known his shame. But those who live in the Presence of God are not as these fools; for when they are by themselves they do nothing that they would not do in the highest human presence. If they speak, they remember that God is listening. They always avoid excess, and in all things observe Christian moderation; in their amusements they are as children playing round a father's knees, but they do not forget that this Father is infinitely perfect, and wills that they should be perfect too; God is ever before their eyes in their walks, in their conversations, and in all their actions. David, in the midst of all the duties and distractions of royalty, says, "Mine eyes are ever towards the Lord";[3] and again: "The Lord is a firmament to them that fear Him;

[1] Ephes. v. 8. [2] John iii. 20.
[3] Ps. xxiv. 15.

and His covenant shall be made manifest to them."[1] Holy persons smitten by a sense of the Divine Presence have been discovered with their faces to the earth, in self-abasement that amazes us. For this reason the great Gregory Lopez and the late M. de Renty used to walk bareheaded, insensible to the heat of the sun and to changes of weather.

But above all, the reverence due to the Presence of God demands the avoidance of sin. Had we but a little faith, how effectually would this truth preserve us from falling. For not only does the sinner sin in the presence of God, Who sees him always, everywhere; but he sins actually within God, Whose greatness fills all things.

For as God is the indwelling Principle of all life and motion, holy writers have well said that He is more intimately within us than our own souls; and that it is within the recesses of His Being that we think, and hear, and act. The sinner, with insolence unspeakable, makes use therefore of the very co-operation of God in our creation to insult and offend His Majesty, by prostituting to evil uses his worldly goods, his health, and every gift of nature and grace which has been bestowed upon him. Can we

[1] Ps. xxiv. 14.

wonder that so horrible an outrage should be visited with never-ending punishment?

It cannot be gainsaid that God observes each one of us with as much attention as though we were the sole beings in the universe. He weighs our every thought, word, deed. We should sometimes be ashamed for the lowest of our fellow-creatures to read our thoughts; how can we dare harbour them within God Himself? How shall we venture to indulge even in imaginations which, if not actually sinful, are at the best foolish, vain, or idle?

How appalling is the state of a soul in mortal sin. Saint Theresa exclaims: "When I think of this horrible thing, I am filled with terror." "Be not astonished at this," she adds, "but rather wonder that it should be possible for me to think of it and live."

CHAPTER V

That God, being Present everywhere, requires of us everywhere the Love of our Hearts.

HOLY SCRIPTURE bears witness that God is a consuming fire.[1] And the beloved disciple teaches us that He is charity.[2] Because then God dwells in us and we truly exist within God, we dwell in a furnace of fire and love. How can we be in the midst of the flames and not burn, or be steeped in charity and not love? We have within us a fire of intensest heat, yet our hearts remain frozen. Who can explain so mysterious a phenomenon?

Our Divine Master said: "I am come to cast fire on the earth: and what will I, but that it be kindled?"[3]

If we deeply meditated on these words, striv-

[1] Heb. xii. 29. [2] John. iv. 16. [3] Luke xii. 49.

ing to enter into the designs of this loving God, we should have no other thought or care than to fan this divine flame, and to kindle it where it burned not. This would be our most fervent desire, and we should hardly be able to forbear crying out, in the words of a great saint: "For love, for the pure love of the One God in Three Persons."

Let us then love God and God alone, at all costs, whatever may betide; let not so great a misery befall us as to divide the allegiance of our hearts. Let us love God wholly in our use of His creatures, in all that we do, in all that we suffer, in all that we are; let us love Him at all times and in all places, in every impulse of life and at the hour of death, so that we may never cease to love Him hereafter.

Whoso loves God possesses Him, and thereby possesses a supreme and infinite good, which ensures for him abiding happiness on earth, even though he be poor, desolate, and stricken with lifelong suffering.

Let us concentrate our minds on the truth that God is the native element of our being, and that our soul is the place of His indwelling, because the human spirit comes forth from God, and gravitates towards the

principle of its existence as towards its centre. Even as a fish would suffer if it were taken out of the water which is its element, though it were placed in a golden basin filled with precious stones, so man may seek in vain for true repose: he will never find it save in God alone.

God be praised that He has given us the capacity for appreciating divine truth. The royal psalmist says: "I set the Lord always in my sight. . . . Therefore my heart hath been glad and my tongue hath rejoiced; moreover my flesh also shall rest in hope."[1] This way, he tells us, is the way of life, and the vision of God is eternal bliss. "Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; Thou shalt fill me with joy with Thy countenance; at Thy right hand are delights for evermore."[2]

Behold how great peace and glory is theirs who abide continually in the Presence of such a Master.

Prayer to the most holy and adorable Trinity.

O my God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, Who fillest the universe with Thine infinity.

[1] Ps. xv. 8, 9. [2] Ps. xv. 11.

Who dost penetrate the deepest recesses of our hearts and as a tender Father bearest us in Thy bosom; O Spirit supremely perfect, first Principle of all things, in Whom and by Whom I am, Who art my Centre and my only Stay; how great has been my blindness, in that I have lived so long with scarce a thought of Thee, while every moment and every action of my life have been in the Presence of Thy divine Majesty. O my God, in every place where I was Thou wert also; Thou didst hear all my words, Thou didst behold all my actions, Thou didst penetrate the depths of my heart and didst lay bare my inmost thoughts. But I heeded it not; I went my way, I conversed, I acted in all things without thought of Thee, without reverence or love for Thee, seeming to forget that Thou hadst endowed me with a soul whose secret joy might be in Thee at every time, in every place, in every circumstance of life, if only I aspired continually towards Thee, and gave no more than needful thought to things exterior.

O my God, how great a good is it to my soul to be perpetually within Thee; how little account is made of so supreme a happiness by the greater part of mankind, who have no place for Thee in mind or heart; so absorbed

and so defiled are they by their earthly and carnal affections.

O most adorable Creator, I desire by Thy grace to render to Thee henceforward that reverence and love which are due to Thee, and to set myself earnestly to live in the recollection of Thy divine Presence. I desire to renounce the exterior natural life of the senses, and to embrace the interior supernatural life of faith, of which Jesus Christ has made all men partakers through the virtue of His Incarnation.

Through His divine merits I implore this grace both for myself and for all who tread this holy way, that we may here be filled with the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit, and hereafter with Him and through Him glorify Thee in heaven. Amen.

BOOK II

CHAPTER I

In what consists the Practice of the Presence of God.

I.—The holy practice of the Presence of God, so strongly enjoined both in Holy Scripture and by the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, consists in a simple but loving recollection of the Presence of God within us. This recollection must be maintained with simplicity; it needs neither exterior assistance nor vocal prayer; nor does it require an effort of the imagination, nor any intellectual strain, which would do harm rather than good, by causing unnecessary weariness and distress.

For just as we should be helped and stimulated by the sight of the friend, father, or master whom we served with the sole desire

of pleasing him, so this divine contemplation, far from being a cause of hindrance, should lighten and sweeten our toil.

The Christian knows well that even the most trifling actions of his life are to be done for God alone, and that he can neither render to Him any worthy service, nor merit heaven, save by the special assistance of divine grace. How then can he be so careless and slothful as never to turn his eyes from material things, that he may raise them heavenwards to the Lord Who constantly beholds him and is ever ready to help him, and thus unconsciously acquire the blessed habit learned by countless holy souls, of living so continually in His holy Presence as not to be distracted even by the most engrossing occupations.

It has been already said that such recollection should be loving as well as simple. This does not mean, however, that we need to be making constant definite acts of love to God, but rather that it should be accompanied by such an interior desire of pleasing God and serving Him, as is in itself a sign of love and of yearning for union with Him. The words of Saint Paul should be the cry of every Christian soul: "Who shall separate me

from the love of Christ?"[1] I desire to belong to God alone; by His mercy I would rather die than commit sin, which alone can separate me from Him; and I have the assurance of hope that by His grace He will keep me from sin.

The practice of the Presence of God must be said to include also a simple remembrance that God is within us; not to the exclusion of the sense of His universal Presence, but because the thought of His abiding within our very selves is a help to meditation, and as such has been held of high account by many holy men.

II.—Again, the practice of the Presence of God may be described as a single glance, raising us, bringing us near to God, and uniting us with Him. This is Saint Paul's meaning when he says, "Our conversation is in heaven."[2]

With this heavenward look should mingle that sense of peace and sweetness which results from our belief in God's fatherly care. It is not needful nor desirable to make strenuous and exhausting efforts in this holy exercise; but rather the soul must often cast faithful and loving glances on the all-perfect God, in

[1] Rom. viii. 35. [2] Philipp. iii. 20.

humble confidence that He Himself will grant to it the gift of perpetual contemplation. So, after having done all that lies in our power, we should throw ourselves lovingly upon Him, saying within ourselves from time to time: "O my soul, how hast thou found it possible to spend so long a time without thought of thy God?"

III.—Thirdly, the practice of the Presence of God is a hidden interior cry to Him for grace.

Let it be then a constantly-recurring appeal to Him to act in concert with us, to fill us continually with His divine Spirit, to be our light in darkness, our strength in weakness, our consolation in tribulation, our all in all. To this end there should be constantly on our lips the words of the royal psalmist: "O God, come to my assistance; O Lord, make haste to help me."[1] For it was ever his holy custom to look to God for that consolation which the world vainly seeks in the creature; even as he says: "I set the Lord always in my sight; for He is at my right hand, that I be not moved. Therefore my heart hath been glad, and my tongue hath rejoiced: moreover my flesh shall rest in hope."[2]

[1] Ps. lxix. 1. [2] Ps. xv. 8.

IV.—Fourthly, the practice of the Presence of God is the silence of a deep reverence in the Presence of His Majesty, a silence wherein the soul says with holy David: "I am brought to nothing, and I knew not. I am become as a beast before Thee,"[1] and in which it should often abide; a deep stillness which, as says the great St. Denys, is the most fitting praise that the creature can offer to the Creator. For not only he, but many other Saints also, maintained such a silence during their ecstasies and transports of divine love; wherein words failed them to express their vision of the glory of God and their gratitude to Him, so that they could but gaze upon His beauty and adore His greatness, and losing themselves in Him, sink as it were into nothingness before His sublime Majesty. This was in very deed the sacrifice of their entire being, heart and soul; for this is true interior devotion, and the essence of spiritual worship. "God is a spirit; and they that adore Him must adore Him in spirit and in truth."[2]

This silent awe is nothing else than the hushing of all interior restlessness in a perfect tranquillity of mind and heart; and the secret of acquiring it lies in the practice of the

[1] Ps. lxxii. 22, 23. [2] John iv. 24.

Presence of God, without which He cannot be worshipped in spirit and in truth; for this is indeed the key to the overcoming of that dissipation of mind which overwhelms most Christians, more especially during the time of prayer, and which is the direct opposite of the spirit of holy concentration possessed by the Saints.

Very grievous therefore is the mistake of those who imagine devotion to consist in the mechanical recitation of many prayers, with no thought either of the words said or of the God to Whom they are addressed, and less still of care to listen for what He should say to the soul. How much more truly would He be honoured by a heartfelt ejaculation repeated but twice or thrice: "My God, I adore Thee, I love Thee, I submit myself in all things to Thy adorable Will." Saint Theresa says that the soul suffers a great loss if it be too full of its own words, and does not listen for the divine Voice. "Think you," says she, "that God is silent when we speak to Him, because we do not hear His Voice? No indeed; He speaks to our hearts whenever our hearts speak to Him."

Saint Augustine, speaking of the divine colloquy between God and the human soul,

says that the Eternal Word and the heart of man have a mutual language, by which they enter into communication. On the part of the Word, this language is His divine desire to give Himself to the soul which speaks to Him. The language of the soul is its fervent longing to come near to God that it may speak with Him and listen to Him; and this mystery is perfectly accomplished in one moment of the adoring silence of which we have been speaking.

V.—Fifthly, the practice of the Presence of God is the entire self-surrender of the soul and all its goods to the divine will of its Lord and Master, in Whom it reposes absolute confidence, and to Whom it often says with David: "Thou art my God; my lots are in Thy hands."[1]

We know, with the assured certainty of faith, that we are always in the divine keeping; for in God and by Him we live and move; and we know also, being so taught by our loving Lord, that He has so great a care for us that not a hair of our head shall perish without His divine permission.[2]

Yet how often we live as though we belonged only to ourselves: and because we cannot see

[1] Ps. xxx. 15, 16. [2] Luke xxi. 18.

God with our natural eyes, we spend our lives without a thought of Him, without a word of gratitude for all the gifts which we receive at the hand of His divine bounty.

But a soul that habitually strives to cultivate the sense of His presence becomes so consciously steeped in Him that it is ever offering itself and all that it has as a sacrifice to Him, in the spirit of confidence and grateful love; withdrawing itself from creatures and casting itself on God by a swift interior impulse, with such words as these, or any others which God may suggest to it: "O my God, all is Thine, all for Thee; I desire naught but Thee Who art my God and my All; my soul seeks for nothing out of Thee, O infinite Love and infinite Perfection."

VI.—Again, the practice of the Presence of God may be said to lie in the entire surrender of our wills to His: as our divine Lord Himself has so perfectly taught us: "Not my will but Thine be done."[1]

A soul may be recalled from wandering among creatures, and raised to God in humblest self-surrender by simply repeating "fiat voluntas tua," as often as God may

[1] Luke xxii. 42.

move it thereto; and will thus insensibly form the blessed habit of swiftly embracing the divine Will in all things.

VII. -Lastly, the practice of the Presence of God is a reflection of the vision of Himself; and a soul that is continually steeped in it may hope to attain to some apprehension of the bliss of the Beatific Vision which is vouchsafed to the blessed in heaven.

O Lord God, what consolation indeed were ours in our exile save for the thought of Thee? If, like Cain, we fled from Thy Presence, and were banished from Thy Heart, what would befall us? Should we not become the prey of our own passions, from which we should have more to fear than he from the fierce beasts that prowled around him as he wandered up and down, fugitive and a vagabond?

It must be remembered that they who consistently practise this holy exercise do not rest in contemplation alone; they wait for God's commands that they may faithfully obey them. "To thee have I lifted up my eyes, Who dwellest in heaven. Behold, as the eyes of servants are on the hand of their masters, as the eyes of the handmaid on the hand of her mistress, so are our eyes unto the Lord our God until He have mercy

upon us."[1] We who as the servants and handmaids of God wait upon His Presence, must be on the alert to obey His least and lightest wish.

Of the various methods here set down, each one must choose for himself that which may best suit him, whereby to enter upon the holy practice of the Presence of God; and when he has entered upon it he must diligently persevere in it, and must not allow himself to be discouraged by the difficulty which will inevitably greet him at the outset, in checking and curbing the impetuosity of human nature. We must remember, as a holy man[2] has well said, that the mind reaches God by one road, the heart by another, even as David sings: "My heart hath said to Thee, my face hath sought Thee. Thy face, O Lord, will I still seek."[3] Our mental attitude towards God must be a sustained and increasing realisation of His Presence both without and within us. We must discern Him as the secret spring of every action, as regulating our hearts' impulses, subduing our passions, adjusting our inequali-

[1] Ps. cxxii. 1–3

[2] Father Gonnelieu, of the Society of Jesus.

[3] Ps. xxvi. 8.

ties, purifying our motives, removing far from us all that would come between us and Him.

The practice of the Presence of God is the concentration of the intelligence upon Him and the aspiration of the spirit towards Him, in ardent longing that He should bestow on us His blessings and favours, so that we may thereby be strengthened against temptation, preserved from occasions of sin, and consoled in sorrow; that our whole being may be supernaturalised; that we may become rich in merit, and attain to a life worthy of God. This mental concentration will be a sustained attitude of waiting upon God, for the deeper understanding of the designs of His providence that we may bravely bear our part in their accomplishment, for increased enlightenment to know His holy Will that we may hasten to carry it out, and for a truer discernment of the graces that He wills to bestow on us, that we may faithfully correspond with them.

Thus we shall deem as of no account all that has no relation to God; we shall renounce every indulgence of the senses and affections that is contrary to His law; we shall continually mortify all irregular and earthly desires,

that we may find our only satisfaction in what is pleasing to God. "My soul refused to be comforted; I remembered God, and was delighted."[1]

When thus we enter into our inner chamber, and shut our doors about us, we offer to God the interior homage of our hearts, and receive from Him in return all riches of His grace and glory; by union with Him we are filled with His fulness and our hearts become inflamed with His love, so that we have no thought but for Him; our action becomes love, and our love action; His presence and His love are the life of our life, He is our only thought in the hour of death.

Saint Augustine says that the single aim of a Christian must be to live in God and for God; because this is as needful for the maintenance of his supernatural life as is the air that he breathes for his natural life. It is idle therefore to imagine that we have no need to renew during the day our morning Act of the Presence of God; for we know well enough that through fickleness and natural inclination we tend but too easily from God to self, and from self to passion or earthly affection. For alas! how shall it fare in death

[1] Ps. lxxvi. 3.

with a soul that has forgotten its Creator and Saviour during the whole of its life? How shall it dare to appear before a God Whom it has never loved, Who is to it a stranger?

O my God, preserve me from so great an ill. Let me never neglect to renew within myself the remembrance of Thy adorable Presence, that my confidence in Thee may be more deeply rooted, my love more firmly established.

But as Father Gonnelieu further teaches us, we need more than recollection of the mind before God; for the sphere of the divine Presence is chiefly within the heart, which must be stayed upon God in constant aspiration and unceasing watchfulness in the things of obedience and love. Holy Scripture enjoins upon us the need of continual prayer. Now it is not possible for the thoughts to be always fixed upon God, nor can we be ceaselessly engaged in vocal prayer; but we can be constantly turning ourselves towards God in the desire of pleasing Him; and this is the spirit and the very essence of perpetual prayer, the heart's spontaneous method of the practice of the Presence of God.

This constant combined aspiration of heart and mind towards Him will be our safeguard against lukewarmness and the insidious assaults of self-love; and the ardent longing of the heart will ensure the stability of the mind and its dependence on God. For when the heart is empty of divine love and filled with the love of creatures, the mind does not tend towards Him; and this is the reason why too often men think so little about God, and cast upon Him but an indifferent and cursory glance.

But as Mary Magdalene, that great lover of Jesus Christ, who, having in her heart no place for any being save Him, was not dazzled by the splendour of the angels whom she beheld at the sepulchre, so the single heart that is wholly and lovingly towards God, seeks Him everywhere, and is not turned aside nor hindered by any created thing.

The fire of divine charity mounts up continually to heaven, bearing the soul with it, purifying it from its unruly affections, and making it worthy to attain to union with the loving Heart of God.

Our morning prayer must be the kindling of this fire within us; all day long we must keep it burning by constant aspiration, by

making the Divine Heart the perpetual refuge of our human heart; we must never allow the fumes of sin to extinguish it, nor suffer it to die down through neglect. So our heart, no longer self-absorbed, shall abide within the divine embrace, and under the sweet yoke of His Will. And if we should have the misfortune to break away through any wilful fault, we must immediately make an act of fervent contrition and hatred of sin, and surrender ourselves afresh to God, no matter how distasteful it may seem to us.

As regards the concentration of mind and heart upon Him, it is very important that we should be convinced not only of its beneficial action but also of its positive necessity for us, if we are to attain to perfection. "God is a spirit; and they that adore Him must adore Him in spirit and in truth. The Father seeketh such to adore Him." That is to say, that if we are to render to God a worship which shall be worthy of Him, it must be spiritual, even as He is spirit, and because He has created us with a responsive spiritual nature; if we are to worship Him in truth, we must also worship Him in spirit.

Now, to worship God in spirit, to offer Him

true spiritual homage, we must both be recollected and attentive in mind, and devout in heart; often breathing out our love to Him, as well as raising our minds to Him; having the whole being turned towards Him. For this is the spiritual worship of which our divine Lord spoke, when He said to the woman of Samaria, "The hour cometh, and now is, when the true adorers shall adore the Father in spirit and in truth;"[1] by which He meant to teach us that the true essence of worship, and true Christian perfection, consist in interior heartfelt adoration.

On another occasion our Lord Jesus Christ reproached the Jews because their worship was but an exterior one, thus showing us how displeasing to God is such perfunctory devotion; for He said: "This people honoureth Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me."[2] So every devotional exercise must be performed in the true spirit of worship, and with the desire of pleasing God.

And since we can hope to succeed in this only by contemplating Jesus Christ, the divine Master of the spiritual life, setting ourselves to learn Him, cultivating the practice of His Presence, and fixing the desires of our

[1] John iv. 23. [2] Matt. xv. 8.

hearts on Him, let us strive, by meditating on what He has done for us, to learn what we should do for Him, and ask Him with all the fervour of which we are capable, to obtain for us by His divine intercession the graces which we need, that He may be formed within us, that we may be clothed with Him, filled with His Spirit, and be made partakers of His divine life.

Prayer to the Incarnate Word.

O Lord Jesus Christ, we worship Thee, hidden for nine months in the deep lowliness of Mary's virginal womb, there profoundly adored by the hosts of heaven, but by man unknown and undiscerned ; and we desire to contemplate this deep mystery, that we may learn from it the secret of that interior life hidden indeed from the world and despised by sinners, but the admiration of angels and the source of angelical virtue through the triumphs of grace in faithful souls on earth.

O infinite Love Divine, how mysterious art Thou, how blind are we. Thou hast willed to hide and obscure Thy glory beneath the veil of human misery ; Thou hast made Thine own every human weakness and infirmity

that Thou mightest win our hearts; and yet we will not hide nor humble ourselves, nor be willing to lose ourselves in Thee that we may be stripped of our wretchedness, and by union with Thee be clothed with Thy fulness, and be made heirs with Thee.

By Thy hidden life Incarnate Thou hast taught us that our only happiness is in union with Thee, in following after Thy Footsteps. And to those who thus follow Thee, Thou dost grant the virtue of Thine infinite merits and Thine all-powerful intercession; Thou bearest the burden of their sins and weakness, taking upon Thee their miseries, and in return heaping Thy glories upon them.

For in these lowly and hidden souls Thou art ever perfecting the great work of Thine Incarnation: day by day Thou art spiritually born again in their hearts and in the hearts of all those who, renouncing self and every created thing, rejoice in receiving Thee to reign within them for ever. And in these hearts Thou willest to live again a hidden interior life unknown to the world, known only to Thy faithful ones.

O adorable Saviour, I implore of Thee, for myself and for all who shall aspire thereto, the grace to tread this hidden way, and

to persevere in it from this hour even until death.

To that end I desire to renounce absolutely both myself and all created goods, as also all worldliness and sensuality, that with Thee I may live this interior life. For though by most men it is unknown and despised, in it alone is to be found true life, and all else is but death and nothingness.

Grant to me then such strength and courage that I may overcome all difficulties and hindrances therein ; and do Thou show me all the ways by which Thou willest me to gain so great a good.

CHAPTER II

That we need to be entirely convinced of the Excellence and Efficacy of the Practice of the Presence of God.

Faithful correspondence with grace is hardly to be defined as a distinct and special virtue; it is rather the mother and life of all virtues, the fruition of good dispositions, the consummation of holy resolutions, the practical realisation of all the means of grace, the pledge of final perseverance, and the seal and assurance of election.

Now faithfulness to the leadings of the Holy Spirit in every movement of His grace is the very process and means whereby the Saints have been built up in sanctity. But how is it possible to be thus faithful to grace unless the spirit be maintained in constant recollection of the divine Presence, listening

for every holy inspiration, firmly resolved to avoid the distractions which ruin so many souls, who live for the pleasure of the moment and in the gratification of every desire, with scarce an effort for self-recollection, paying little or no heed to the Presence of God, ignoring and despising His interior calls. These expose themselves to the self-same condemnation by which Jerusalem perished, because, as we learn from the lips of Him who is the very Truth, she knew not the time of her visitation, so that when her Saviour came she received Him not, but lost Him by her negligence. And still the same desolation lays waste the earth, as says the prophet Jeremias: "With desolation is all the land made desolate: because there is none that considereth in the heart."[1]

Some morning prayers hastily recited and a Mass heard with little or no devotion, are considered by many Christians as sufficient for their spiritual duty; these performed, they spend the remainder of the day in absolute self-pleasing, their own inclinations the sole measure of their thoughts, words, and actions; with no attempt at self-mortification, and making no sacrifice for the salvation of their

[1] Jer. xii. 11.

souls ; in a word, living as entirely without the thought of God as if for them no God existed. This slothful and self-indulgent life of thoughtless indifference is the undoing of many persons who are content to live as they were born and to die as they have lived, in their natural earthliness and corruption ; who lead a life of sensuality and heathendom, the very opposite of faithful service, and altogether different from the servants and handmaidens of whom David speaks, whose eyes are ever on the hands of their masters, watching to fulfil their lightest wish. The living ardent prayers of the Psalter are indeed an abiding witness that David himself, the man after God's own heart, lived perpetually in divine contemplation.

I.—The practice of the Presence of God is a sovereign preventive against sin. Of this Saint Ambrose assures us ; while Saint Thomas asks, speaking on the same subject, how it were possible to insult God deliberately, if we remembered that we were ever in His Presence and before His eyes ?

II.—The recollection of His Presence is also a firm defence in the hour of temptation. These are the words of Saint Basil ; while Saint Augustine says : " Remember that God looks upon thee as a general upon his soldiers in

time of war; on the one hand He is ever present to help and succour thee the moment that thou appealest to Him; on the other, He has honours in store for thee when the victory is accomplished over His enemies and thine."

The same Saint says that we may find heaven anywhere if the heart be one with God, and that this joy of union is the most potent means of triumphing over sin and the evil one.

The saintly author of the *Imitation of Christ* says: "A lover of Christ and of truth, one who is truly of the inner life and free from inordinate affections, can freely turn himself to God, and in spirit raise himself above himself, and rest in enjoyment." And again: "To walk with God within, and not to be held by any affection without, is the state of an interior man."

And again: "God is in all creatures; everywhere the soul may find Him and become one with Him; but within our hearts He loves to dwell if we are faithful to Him, as in a sanctuary; there He fills the creature with Himself through ways at which the Angels marvel."

III.—Faithful perseverance in the practice

of the Presence of God is the shortest road to perfection. When God is present, says a saintly father,[1] all else disappears, and the soul is alone with Him. Holy souls know, by blessed experience, that one quarter of an hour with God is better than many hours spent in earthly occupations, which have no value save in so far as they may bring us nearer to God.

How can any one say that he has no interests, when the great work and interest of the soul is to strive after union with God and the perpetual abiding presence of Jesus Christ within us through the life of faith? Rather let such an one say: "I have indeed much to do. God abides within me; He is there all alone; I must hasten to entertain Him, to unite myself with Him, to make myself like to Him; I must go and kiss His Feet, since he condescends to enter under my very roof."

Let us write upon our hearts these beautiful words from the *Imitation of Jesus Christ*: "Turn thyself with thy whole heart to the Lord and forsake this miserable world, and thy soul shall find rest. Learn to despise outward things and to give thyself to those

[1] M. de Bernières.

that are within, and thou shalt see the kingdom of God come unto thee.

"For the kingdom of God is peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, which is not given to the wicked.

"Christ will come to thee, holding out to thee His consolation, if thou prepare Him a fit dwelling in thy heart. All glory and beauty (in which He delights) are within, and therein He takes delight.

"For so He saith: 'If any one love me he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and will make our abode with him.'[1]

"Give place, then, for Christ, and deny entrance to all others.

"When thou hast Christ, thou art rich, and He is sufficient for thee. He will provide for thee and faithfully supply thy wants in all things, so that thou needest not to trust to men.

"For men quickly change and presently fail; but Christ abides for ever, and stands by us firmly even to the end."

IV.—The practice of the Presence of God gains for us great increase of faith, strengthens our hope and kindles our love. For the

[1] John xiv. 23.

frequent thought of Him must of necessity beget a living faith ; in like manner, if we dwell on the thought of His Fatherhood, remembering that we not only came forth from Him but also perpetually live and move in Him, and are constantly maintained and nurtured by Him, our hope and confidence in Him cannot fail to grow and strengthen ; while if we often look up to Him, He will be moved to look upon us with such burning glances of Divine charity as shall set our hearts on fire of love.

V.—The practice of the Presence of God has power to communicate such grace that the soul is speedily enabled to attain to the exercise of each and every virtue ; for to be constantly recollected before God in the attitude of reverent love, is indeed to love Him, to adore and give thanks to Him, to be truly humble and entirely self-surrendered. Wherefore Saint Basil says : "If thou wouldest do everything perfectly, remember always that God seeth thee."

VI.—If we should desire any further proof of the high excellence of this holy practice, we have it in the sublime injunction of God to Abraham : "Walk before me and be perfect."[1]

[1] Gen. xvii. 1.

For he who diligently walks before God finds God everywhere, within himself and without, lives with God, in Him and even on Him: and herein lies true perfection.

He lives with God in the intimacy of almost constant intercourse: in Him because his only repose is found in Him; he verily and indeed lives on God, because in this close union with Him, God becomes the very food and life of his mind and heart. Well may a holy servant of God exclaim: "How great a happiness, and one how little known, to live continually in God."

God is a fiery sun shining upon us and within us day and night, yet we will not take the trouble so much as to open our eyes to look at Him; in the midst of light we abide in darkness: in the midst of a furnace of fire we remain lukewarm, yea, cold.

But if we would be more earnestly moved to the practice of the Presence of God, let us consider its blessed effects in souls who faithfully persevere in it.

Because their gaze is ever fixed upon God, they know both Him and themselves with a knowledge altogether new; they behold themselves reflected in Him as in a flawless mirror, in which their every imperfection is plainly

visible. The purity of God reveals to them their slightest stain; His holiness their least imperfection; His faithfulness their smallest derelictions. They realise with certain conviction that what the world holds dearest is but vanity and unworthy of our love. They say from the depths of their heart, "God is all in all, and the rest not at all"; they make their own the aspiration of Saint Francis: "My God and my All."

Such souls possess a singular simplicity, through which they see God only in all things. Theirs is the single eye of which the Gospel speaks; as the dove's eyes of the Bride in the Canticle of Canticles, so are theirs; in the contemplation of the divine Presence they seek not their own things, looking neither for consolation nor sweetness nor even for spiritual advancement, but desiring God for Himself only, and yearning after Him with all the strength of their being. As the magnetised needle when it is forcibly turned away from the point to which it tends perpetually quivers until it is restored to its centre of attraction, so their hearts rest not until they attain God. Therefore they never voluntarily tarry among things of earth, but are constantly mounting up to Him. All

things out of God seem to them distasteful and a weariness. It is with them as with the great Apostle, who said: "I count all things to be but loss for the excellent knowledge of Christ my Lord; for Whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but as dung, that I may gain Christ."[1]

It follows certainly that souls who persevere long in this holy practice will become spiritualised; because by constantly thinking of God and desiring Him, they become as it were instinct with Him. For how should not a soul whose loving gaze is ever fixed upon God not become like to Him, so far at least as is possible to our poor human weakness? Do we not catch the manner and ways of those in whose society we constantly are? Does not a painter by careful study of an original produce a faithful copy? Do not creatures that live perpetually in the snowy regions themselves become white? If a perfume clings to us when we have been long in its neighbourhood, and if iron molten in the furnace becomes charged with the colour and heat of the fire, how can we remain long time in union with God without assimilating some of His divine qualities, and

[1] Philipp. iii. 8.

becoming filled and consumed with His love?

The soul that has firmly resolved to walk before God and to hold Him in its thoughts does indeed look upon Him as its centre and true repose; it knows that out of Him it is in as unsuitable an environment as a fish out of water, useless as a member out of joint; it realises by personal experience the truth of Saint Augustine's words: "O Lord, thou hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts know no rest until they find Thee."

What has been said should be sufficient to stir the most slothful and lukewarm heart to consider the great benefits which attach to the holy practice of the Presence of God. Let us earnestly pray that God will in His goodness speedily grant us to realise in our own lives the divine truths which we have been contemplating.

In the next chapter consideration will be made of some false objections that have been raised against the holy practice, which, if not dissipated, might cause difficulty and discouragement to beginners or to timid souls.

CHAPTER III

A Refutation of False Objections sometimes urged against the Practice of the Presence of God.

I.—It has been said that this holy exercise is not suitable for general practice.

It is quite true that some will have greater and some less facility in practising recollection, but to shrink from it entirely on this account is both a temptation and a fatal mistake. What were we born for, save to know, love, and serve God? But how can we do these things without frequent thought of Him, and how can we think of Him without realising His Presence? Why do so many persons live without thought of Him, as though they were in total ignorance of His supreme authority over them, of all that they owe Him in return for His goodness, and

most of all of His Omnipresence? Why, but that they never take the trouble to think seriously about it?

It must be remembered also that if God be very close to and even within all sorts and conditions of men with no single exception, no one can be exempt from the duty of respectful attention to the fact of His holy Presence.

II.—That it is too difficult and too wearisome. Do not the very words shame us? Shall we find it difficult or irksome to remember a God Whose Presence we discern everywhere, Who continually heaps benefits upon us, Who is to us father mother, friend, and spouse? What child will say that it is impossible to remember the father in whose very house and society he lives, whom he cannot but see and think of at every turn? Will he not rather exclaim, How can I possibly forget him?

Some objection on the score of difficulty might indeed be urged, were it suggested that the thoughts must be perpetually dwelling on God, especially as the capacity for constant contemplation is a divine and extraordinary gift; but no one could refuse

to do his best in the matter, save the hardened sinner to whom the Presence of God is intolerable, because, being under the Divine wrath, he has in some measure forestalled the misery of hell.

But to the sinner who longs to return into the way of salvation there is no more powerful stimulus than the sense of God's Presence; how much more then should his true servants desire to live in the perpetual contemplation of it?

III.—That this kind of devotion is both the offspring and the parent of idleness.

What could be more untrue? But this or the like is said even by persons who think themselves religious, but who have never had any true experience of the meaning of recollection, and who think that unless they are perpetually engaged in active exterior works, they are idle.

To these a holy servant of God makes reply: "O blessed idleness, born of God, so little known by the restless spirit of man! How happy are we when through knowing our emptiness we learn our nothingness! O blessed possibility through which by dying to ourselves, we live in Jesus Christ alone! O admirable silence that renders a homage

more eloquent than many words! How blessed the subjection of our passions, when sense no longer distracts us; how peaceful the desert where we forego all that we may find All; where we are never less alone than when we are in solitude."

Is it idleness to worship God with inward adoration, to humble ourselves to the dust before His Majesty, to surrender ourselves to His holy will, to pour out before Him our longings to love Him more and serve Him better? For this is the true meaning of the practice of the Presence of God, which, far from engendering idleness, incites us to all sorts of good works through the interior courage with which it fills us; and if there be any who, under cover of giving themselves to holy contemplation, permit themselves to neglect their ordinary duties, and make no effort to do better, they alone are to blame, and not the holy practice. And it is not unlikely that such persons, though on the surface they appear to be recollected, are in reality making no interior effort to practise the Presence of God.

Moreover, this attitude of soul is a means to great perfection in every kind of prayer, of which it cannot hinder any single method.

No prayer offered without recollection could be otherwise than very imperfect, since the most perfect disposition for prayer is to be filled with the sense of His adorable Presence on Whom alone all our faculties, our mind with its thoughts, our heart with its affections, should be riveted when we approach Him.

But recollection in prayer will undoubtedly be impossible if during the livelong day we let our thoughts and imaginings run wild, and take no pains at all to collect ourselves at least from time to time; and hence it is that to so many people prayer is unprofitable and a weariness; for as soon as ever they rise from their knees, the flow of their thoughts rushes unchecked with the force of a torrent which has burst its dam; so that the fruit, often of laborious toil, is lost in a moment.

Saint Francis of Sales says that the soul should go forth from prayer as one who carries a vessel full of choicest perfumes; he will keep it discreetly closed, and will walk with the utmost care for fear of losing the sweet fragrance. Our hearts are vessels which God sometimes vouchsafes to fill with His most precious perfumes. How careful should we be

to preserve them to the utmost by the spirit of recollection.

And for this there is no surer means than to live in His Presence, of which He will give us so constant and so sweet a sense that we shall always be inclined for prayer, and shall thus attain to that life of continual contemplation which is the reward of those pure and single-hearted souls whose every moment is one of faithful service in the Presence of their Lord.

IV.—That this practice tends to presumption and vanity.

It is not difficult to see that this idea is erroneous. It is perfectly true that vanity may result from this as from every other holy thing, even Holy Communion itself; but who will dare to say that Communion induces vanity?

It is indeed essentially untrue that this practice gives occasion for self-complacency; on the contrary, it is effectual in engendering humility, for it reveals to us the greatness and perfections of God; which, contrasted with the depths of our misery, would rather plunge us into despair than exalt us in our own eyes, were it not that the same Divine illumination which reveals our

wretchedness, shows us the fatherly mercy of God towards the humble and penitent sinner, the loving condescension of the Good Shepherd for the erring sheep, the ardent longing of the Saviour Who shed His Blood for the salvation of souls.

Furthermore, a soul which perseveres in the holy Practice becomes so sensitive and fearful of displeasing God, that it instantly discerns in itself the least fault, and is thereby pierced to the quick, and filled with longing to make prompt reparation by a humble acknowledgment of the insult offered to God; for it realises that the offence was committed before the very face of His Divine Majesty, and is overwhelmed by the same sense of confusion as that which we experience, when, unconscious of the presence of a person whom we highly respect, we chance to have said of him some disparaging word.

A further argument may be advanced to prove the unsoundness of the suggestion that the practice of God's Presence tends to foster vanity.

The virtue of humility belongs to a higher order than the purely human, and can only be truly taught by Jesus Christ Himself; Who, because He alone has true greatness and

dignity, alone can truly humble and lower Himself; for it is evident that a creature that came out of nothingness, being unable to sink itself lower than into the nothingness of its own origin, can but place itself in the state which appertains to it.

Pride of birth or of worldly promotion should assuredly not take to itself credit to which it has no claim; since no created greatness has its source within itself, being but derived from that glory which is the essential property of God alone.

Now if we forget God we become estranged from Him; whereas the more our thoughts turn towards Him, the more we are drawn to desire union with Him and the love of Jesus Christ; and the closer this union, the more we become of one mind with Him and the more increasingly filled with Divine charity, which is intrinsically opposed to the inordinate self-love that begets pride and every lust. The Practice of God's Presence, far therefore from making us vain and self-sufficient, will be fruitful in bringing us to a life of union with God, which is the foundation of true humility.

V.—That want of leisure and opportunity for concentrated thought render this holy exercise impossible. But this, far from being a reason

against the Practice of God's Presence, creates an even greater need for it, and should therefore be a stronger inducement towards it. Is attention to our salvation, which is the one thing needful, to yield to the pressure of worldly business?

Besides which, if business is necessarily so engrossing that it is really impossible to think of God as often as people of greater leisure can do, He will assuredly take the will for the deed.

He is so full of kindness that He, as it were, suits His requirements to our conditions and occupations, provided only that we do our best to bring our hearts back to Him from time to time. He waits for our convenience, always ready to receive us, and rejoices especially when, in the midst of necessary worldly business, we turn from it in spirit that we may hold converse with Him.

God has His whole-hearted lovers in every state of life, in the world and in the cloister; it remains with us to see that we be among this company. What matters it whether we are so placed that it costs us years to attain to what others achieve in a short time? For if the delay comes not of our own seeking, the sterner the struggle and the more

complete the self-surrender, the greater the merit and the more blessed the reward.

Let us not then suffer distractions or anxieties to be made a pretext for neglecting this holy Practice, which can never hinder, but must rather help our material advancement. And why should God be left out in the consideration of our worldly prospects? Do not they, as all else, belong to Him? Is it not the more necessary to seek enlightenment, assistance, and grace from Him in times of difficulty, that we may both achieve temporal success and also be saved from occasions of displeasing Him?

Yet with such poor and feeble arguments would some lovers of self try to excuse their cowardice, slothfulness, and inconstancy. For them we should pray that if they have not yet resolved to put aside delays and forthwith to set about learning the holy Practice, they should at least be moved to desire that some day this happiness should be theirs. We should pray also that they may humbly ask of Almighty God this grace, sorrowfully owning to Him that by their own great fault and neglect they stand in danger of spending the chief part of their lives in distraction and dissipation of spirit.

For thus will God first bless their good dispositions, and after He has softened their hearts by His long-suffering tenderness, so win them by the sweetness of His love, that henceforth all their happiness shall be in contemplating Him; and He will be their peace and assurance for ever.

CHAPTER IV

Of the Means whereby the Habit of Recollection may be acquired.

I.—The soul that would learn to walk continually in the Presence of God must before all things resolve to give itself wholly to Him; and must often renew this blessed resolution, speaking to God with great love and earnestness of its desire to be henceforward His alone.

This was the method employed by Saint Francis of Sales. He used to say to those under his spiritual direction: "You have not forgotten your good resolutions; be constant; we belong to God, Who is our all; what need we beside Him, since we have Him for our faithful and abiding Friend?" And true indeed is it that though we should have neither light, sweetness, nor consolation,

if our Divine Lord but remain with us we want for nothing, since in Him we possess all, Who is the Author and Giver of all. And certain it is that He Who has so patiently sought us, and at so great price redeemed us, loves us too tenderly to let go of us, unless by our own wilfulness we break away from Him and deliberately turn ourselves to creatures, which will not happen if we are faithful to our holy resolutions.

II.—Since one of the chief ways of attaining to a perfect self-surrender is to do all as in God's sight, we must constantly persevere in the desire of learning this blessed habit; but always with gentleness and humility. For Saint Francis of Sales well says that if we set about it with too hot haste and eagerness we shall spoil all, because we shall be easily disquieted and shall depend too much upon ourselves, so that the hurry and confusion will prevent any one of our undisciplined impulses from bringing forth good fruit. A soul that is so unrestrained in its ardour, and thinks to be perfected in a moment, will probably, he says, harm both itself and others. We must be content to persevere in humble hope, following the methods suggested to us, and leaving the results en-

tirely in the hands of God. For our loving desires and painstaking efforts will greatly please Him, even if we never attain to entire success. And our desires must be humble also, because as it is only by the favour of God that we shall attain the holy habit, we must seek for His grace with deep lowliness of heart.

III.—When we have fallen into some imperfection, or even into sin, we must not be as some who are restless and uneasy until they have been to confession, for such disquietude is no mark of humility nor of progress; but we must rather turn towards God with great dutifulness, taking refuge in His boundless mercy, humbling ourselves before Him, and asking pardon for our fault. For our failures, far from estranging us from God through disappointment and discouragement, should rather bring us nearer to Him, just as a little child whose mother leads it clings the more closely to her hand after a fall.

IV.—If we would make progress in the Practice of God's Presence, we shall not do better than follow Saint Augustine, Saint Theresa, and Saint Catherine of Siena. These holy Saints entered into themselves, that, finding God within them, they might shun

intercourse with creatures. For thus speaks Saint Augustine: "Wilt thou not, O man, even for a short time forsake thy vain occupations and strip thee of the incessant distractions which assail thy thoughts; lay aside thy cares and take leisure to think about God, to repose thyself upon Him; enter within the chamber of thine heart, thrust out from it all except thy God and that which can aid thee in thy search for Him; and when thy doors are shut about thee, say to Him with all thy soul, 'Lord, I seek Thy Face; I will ever seek it. O adorable Master, enlighten my poor heart, show it how and where Thou must be sought, by what ways and means Thou canst be found; teach me that if Thou art not within me, where indeed shall I seek Thee? And if Thou art everywhere, how is it that I find Thee not present with me?'"

Saint Theresa, speaking of her soul as an interior heaven where Jesus Christ wills to take His delights, to make Himself known and loved, says: "Let it be well known by those who can enclose themselves within the little paradise of their soul, where He dwells Who created both it and the whole world, that they walk in an excellent way, and that they shall

at length come to drink of the water of the Fountain; for in a short time they shall make great progress." Saint Catherine of Siena looked on her heart as an oratory, where, in spite of all worldly hindrances, she could ever be apart with God, there to adore Him in spirit and in truth; and by this holy inspiration was shielded from the persecution of her parents, who forced her to work incessantly, that she might have no time for prayer and so might lose her spirit of devotion and recollection. But God kept her soul ever busy in His service; and thus, far from suffering loss, she exchanged her set times of prayer for a life of perpetual contemplation.

Let us think of ourselves as willing victims, ready to be offered on the altar of our hearts to God present within us; or as spouses of Jesus Christ, contemplating Him with eyes of love; or, as Saint Francis of Sales suggests, as statues, which have no existence save for the pleasure of him who owns them; or again as penitents, pierced like Mary Magdalene with the sense of sin, prostrate at the feet of Jesus Christ.

For, says Saint Francis of Sales, how is it with Mary when she is seated at the feet of her Master, hearing His words? She speaks

not, weeps not, sighs not, she does not even pray; a profound stillness encompasses her; she pays no heed to the steps of Martha, cumbered with active labours.

It may indeed happen that in spite of a great longing to live thus ever in God's presence, we may suffer from distractions, or even experience a distaste for it; but this will be no real hindrance to our genuine intention and desire to be continually with Him; and this in a spirit of sacrifice, for His greater glory, and not to please our own self-love, which ever seeks some satisfaction or pleasure for itself, even in spiritual things.

V.—When we wake in the morning, we must be very careful to recall God's Presence within us. It is not sufficient to recite some vocal prayers; we must also arouse our hearts, that we may adore Him in spirit; and we should further strive to retain this interior recollection until we kneel down to prayer. We must make a special effort to curb the wandering thoughts which tend to run away with us at the beginning of the day, by making some fervent ejaculations to God, such as: "O my God, my eyes have opened but for Thee; I desire that they may be ever fixed on Thy adorable Countenance! O my

God, how good Thou art: I desire naught but Thee; look upon me, O Lord, with the eyes of Thy mercy. I would rather have one gracious glance from Thee, than all the honours and riches of earth. What can I do for Thy love and to show my gratitude to Thee? How blessed it is to love Thee and to serve Thee faithfully. O keep me this day from displeasing Thee."

VI.—We should never enter upon prayer without placing ourselves in God's Presence, saying with Jacob, in deep adoring reverence, "The Lord is in this place";[1] or with Abraham, "I will speak to my Lord, whereas I am dust and ashes";[2] or with Samuel, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth";[3] or with David, "I am become as a beast before thee";[4] or with the publican, "O God, be merciful to me a sinner."[5] If the minds of those who prayed were steeped in such thoughts, it would less frequently happen that prayers, and more especially the responses of the Mass, were irreverently gabbled with indecent haste, to the great disedification of heretics.

Saint John Climachus relates of one of his

[1] Gen. xxviii. 16.
[2] Gen. xviii. 27.
[3] 1 Kings iii. 10.
[4] Ps. lxxii. 23.
[5] Luke xviii. 13.

brethren, that he observed him to be more attentive in choir than the rest, and noticed especially that at the beginning of the hymns he seemed to be speaking to some one. The Saint besought him to tell the meaning of this. The holy monk replied: "It is my custom at the beginning of the Divine Office to recall the attention of my heart, mind, and thoughts, and to say to them, 'Venite, adoremus, et procidamus ante Dominum qui fecit nos; quia ipse est Dominus Deus noster, nos autem populus ejus et oves pascuæ ejus': 'O come, let us worship and fall down and weep before the Lord who made us; for He is the Lord our God, and we are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand.'" [1] Saint Chrysostom says: "When thou enterest in to prayer, think to thyself that thou art entering within that heavenly court where the King of Glory is enthroned amid countless stars, and surrounded by a great multitude of angels and saints whose looks are bent upon thee, as says the Apostle Saint Paul, 'We are made a spectacle to the world and to angels and to men.'" [2]

Saint Bernard gives us this valuable counsel, having himself put the same in practice:

[1] Ps. xciv. 7. [2] 1 Cor. iv. 9.

"When thou enterest a church or committest thyself to prayer, say to thyself: 'Tarry here, all ye evil and undisciplined thoughts; and thou, O my soul, do thou enter into the joy of thy Lord, that thou mayest learn to know and to do His holy Will.'"

VII.—The example of Saint Theresa suggests another method of learning holy recollection. She was accustomed to contemplate her Divine Master as uniting His prayers with hers, and to unite herself with Him in like manner, praying with Him and through Him. We shall not find much difficulty in doing the same, especially when we are reciting the Paternoster which He Himself has given to us, and which, in the person of His disciples, He did in some measure offer for us and with us. Let us always say it in union with Him, remembering that to us as to them He says, "Thus therefore shall you pray,"[1] and still delights to offer our prayers with His to His Father in heaven.

VIII.—We should from time to time, both in our prayers and in our work, lift up our hearts in fervent aspiration to God, that we may thereby either enter into His Presence or assure ourselves that we abide in it.

[1] Matt. vi. 9.

Of this practice Saint Bonaventura says: "The acts by which we should raise our hearts to God in the holy exercise of His Presence, are the ardent longings of our affections and the deep sighings of love wherewith we call upon Him, together with holy and sensitive movements of the will, by which it mounts up as on wings that it may fly swiftly towards Him. Just as in the act of respiration we instinctively draw in the breath and exhale it again from our very depths, so swiftly and almost imperceptibly should we dart up from our inmost hearts fervent longings for closer and more intimate union with God."

IX.—At night, on retiring to rest, we should strive to withdraw our soul from creatures, that we may repose upon the bosom of our God, saying with the psalmist: "I will lay me down in peace and take my rest. Into Thy hands I commend my spirit protect me under the shadow of Thy wings. May our bodies so sleep in Thee that our minds may ever watch towards Thee."

X.—Spiritual reading is a fruitful assistance to the Practice of the Presence of God; and especially of such books as treat of the interior life, such as the writings of Saint Theresa

and of Saint Francis of Sales, especially his treatise on Divine Charity; and those also of Dr. Tauler, and of M. de Bernières, with many others, who have written on the subject with deep knowledge and great fervour.

All these methods will help us to concentrate our minds or to bring them back when they have wandered; for although it is easy to resolve to live in God's Presence, and at first sight it seems as if the grace could be quickly attained, our confirmed habits of distraction and our natural love of liberty and self-indulgence do in truth constitute grave hindrances to success; so that we have need to say with Saint Paul: "I see another law in my members, fighting against the law of my mind."[1]

We must therefore strive to gain imperceptibly, and by slow degrees, that which we cannot obtain all at once, hoping for greater things from our fidelity in small matters than from our heroic resolutions, and confident that what we have sought with perseverance, God will grant us to hold with faithfulness; so that we shall at length find our greatest joy and consolation to be the possession of what is for a time irksome to undisciplined and unrestrained nature.

[1] Rom. vii. 23.

But since we must be, as Saint Theresa says, always busied about our holy labours, that our soul may be constantly recalled from its dissipation and reunited with its holy Spouse in a sweet and blessed intercourse, it will be well to make some small practical suggestions which have been found helpful to many persons. There are some who recite brief prayers at every hour, recalling the Presence of God whenever the clock strikes; but together with this there must be a holy recollectedness, so that God may be glorified within us in that spirit of devotion which is pleasing to Him. Persons living in the country, where they do not hear the sound of the clock, place some reminder upon their arm, which shall serve to recall to them the Presence of God, and their need of corresponding fidelity to His will, of watchfulness against sin, and of patience under trial.

Those who live in the country may also make an act of the Presence of God whenever they see a wayside Cross, or pass a chapel of Our Lady, or her statue, or when they see bells; or they would do well to do frequent honour in their hearts to the great Sacrament of the Altar, or to invoke their Angel Guardian, or the patron Saint of the church or parish.

Again, when we see a beautiful view or contemplate the greatness of heaven and the splendour of the firmament, we should praise and give thanks to the Almighty Creator; or when we are in the presence of many persons gathered together, we may salute their Angel Guardians and unite ourselves with them in praising and adoring God.

In like manner, when we wake in the night, we should recall the Presence of Him Who dwells in light which no man can approach unto, and unite ourselves with those holy companies who rise night by night for praise and prayer, and with the holy Angels who offer Him continual homage in heaven, on earth, and before every Tabernacle; yes, and with Jesus Christ Himself, Who, day and night a willing Victim in the adorable Sacrament of the Altar, offers to His Father worthy honour and adoration.

There are some religious communities where every one, even visitors staying in the house, kneels when each hour strikes to adore the most holy Trinity. There are also households where the same practice is observed unless discretion should forbid it. Members of the Carthusian Order, when they receive visitors, begin the conversation with prayer, after

the custom of the first Christians. Would that their holy fervour could be restored among us.

For, in truth, so great is the honour vouchsafed by God to us who are but dust and ashes, in permitting us to look upon Him and hold converse with Him, that we should leave no stone unturned to make ourselves more worthy of His condescension. The mind with its crowded canvas, the heart with its tumultuous affections, must be brought into recollection and obedience; we must be resolved to bear bravely all interior trials, be they distractions which harass us, or the weariness and absence of sensible consolation which not uncommonly afflict souls after they have practised the Presence of God for a while. For then faith will be their support; and they will realise that all that they may suffer in the practice of the holy Exercise is to be counted as nothing, even as courtiers make light of all their labours and efforts to obtain a glance, still more a favourable word, from their earthly king. How great a privilege should it be then to us to forego man's society for a while, that we may contemplate the Presence of the most adorable Trinity.

CHAPTER V

Of the chief Hindrances to the Practice of the Presence of God.

AFTER having considered how best to make progress in the recollection of God's holy Presence, we shall now do well to consider briefly the chief hindrances thereto by which we are likely to be beset.

I.—Pride, inordinate self-love, and attachment to creatures, hinder us most of all from walking in the Presence of God.

For through pride the creature rebels against the Creator, and robs Him of what belongs to Him alone; and hiding itself from its only light, becomes so blinded that having eyes it sees not, and having ears hears not; so that it cannot discern any spiritual truth, neither can God reveal Himself to it.

The inordinate love of self makes us slaves

to our own passions and regardless of all save our own interests. It is the parent of all vices; for these spring from the urgent suggestions of self-indulgence to break away from Divine restraints; and what is even worse, it prompts us to banish God from mind and heart, that we may give freer rein to our evil and corrupt inclinations; and it is also radically opposed to true charity, whose first principle is the laying aside of self, thereby to realise a more complete union with God. But by attachment to self and to creatures we bind ourselves fast to material things, making it impossible for our minds to dwell on heavenly joys, and thus our souls are so ensnared that they cannot take flight upwards to their God.

II.—We may next reckon self-indulgence, an extreme love of talking, unmortified curiosity, and the overloading of ourselves with useless undertakings required neither by duty nor charity, as being most opposed to the practice of recollection, and therefore of the Presence of God.

By self-indulgent ways, whether of flesh or spirit, we become slaves of our unruly passions, our self-control is weakened, and we are not able to persevere in conquering ourselves, so that neither does the flesh become

subject to the spirit, nor the spirit to God; for if we will not do the least violence to our desires nor thwart ourselves in any way, we shall find it impossible to check our evil tendencies even for a moment, so as to fix our hearts upon God.

Incessant talking so exhausts the powers of the soul that there is nothing left for God. The memory, the imagination, the understanding, are all occupied in conveying ideas to the reason through the medium of words. When, therefore, the tongue sets in motion the forces of a soul full of earthly imaginings, that soul becomes like to a vessel of water which cannot remain clear because the sediment at the bottom has been stirred up.

It follows therefore that in proportion as the spirit is through silence maintained in purity and peace, so by undue talking it is filled with darkness and disquietude, and rendered incapable of interior recollection.

Curiosity to know what does not concern us, with the habit of criticising the actions of others, distract our attention from our own souls and their faults, make us shallow and frivolous, and breed self-love, by reason of our partiality for ourselves and our uncharitable contempt for others. Besides which, by

centring our thoughts upon exterior things, we lose our union with God, for we neither converse with Him nor taste the blessedness of His Presence.

Lastly, if we overburden ourselves with useless undertakings, we dissipate our energies and waste our spiritual substance, misuse the time which should be given to duties, and work confusion and disorder within ourselves. So by degrees we lose entirely that interior peace and tranquillity which are before all things needful if we would know the joy of fellowship with God.

BOOK III

CHAPTER I

Some Practical Means whereby we may attain further Progress in the Practice of the Presence of God.

HUMAN society is marred by two drawbacks. The first is that intercourse with our fellow-men is apt to be wearisome and distasteful, since we are frequently obliged to associate with those with whom we have no mental affinity; the second, which is even more serious, that the pleasantest conversation is often the most dangerous and even sinful.

Intercourse with God is exempt from both these snares; in it there is neither sin nor weariness, but perfect innocence and unalloyed delight.

If then, O Christian soul, thou wouldest experience for thyself this blessedness, be

faithful to follow the leadings of the Holy Ghost and of holy Wisdom, and to imitate the examples which they shall suggest to thine heart.

Does not God love thee? Learn, then, to love Him. Does He not delight to be with thee? Let it be thine to dwell with Him, to spend thy mortal life in the joy of His Presence, as thou wilt indeed spend thine eternity.

Accustom thyself to confide in Him as in a friend; and think not that thou must needs come before Him shrinking and shamefaced, as a trembling slave who seeks a speedy escape from the constraint of his master's presence to find elsewhere his liberty and all his joy.

For why has God created us in His own image and likeness, and delight that we should call Him Father, but that He wills us to behave towards Him as loving, respectful, and obedient children?

Why has He given us His only-begotten Son to be our Master, yea, our Brother, to make atonement for our sin, but that we may be reconciled with God, and be made one with Himself and the Father, even as He said, "That they may be one, as we also are one."[1]

[1] John xvii. 22.

Why did our Divine Redeemer send the Holy Ghost to dwell with us, but that we may be filled with His life, and be strengthened to walk in the way of salvation?

Why has He so crowned us with loving-kindness as to give Himself to us with the fulness of Charity in the adorable Sacrament of the Altar, lovingly urging us to dwell in Him, but that he may prove His readiness to dwell with us and to make His abode with us, together with the Father and the Holy Ghost?

Why indeed has He done for us so many and great things, more than we could have looked for from the best of fathers, from the kindest of brothers, or from the dearest friend? Why but that He might drive from our hearts all servile fear, and fill them with love and confidence? "If any one love Me he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and will make Our abode with him."[1]

II.—Learn, then, that God, the stern Master and the Sovereign Lord, wills also to be the soul's most intimate lover; and that when He deigns to hold secret converse with His faithful ones, He adjusts His greatness to the proportions of His creatures, be they

[1] John xiv. 23.

highest or lowest. Think not then that He cannot be troubled with thy hopes, thy fears, thy business, or thy schemes, even with all that concerns thee, but speak to Him of them with an open and loving heart, while yet thou art engaged upon thy daily work. Act towards Him as thou dost towards those who love thee and whom thou lovest; for He is near to thee even as they are; speak to Him as thou wouldest speak to them, and trust Him with thine inmost thoughts.

Supreme respect is indeed due to God at all seasons, but if by an interior monition He specially make known or recall to thee His Presence, He requires of thee, as the greatest honour thou canst pay to Him and the best return for His favour shown, that thou shouldest speak to Him as to one dear to thee in the intimacy of love and confidence, with no shadow of that false humility so sternly condemned by Saint Theresa.

III.—Listen to the words of the prophet: "The Lord hath heard the desire of the poor; thine ear hath heard the preparation of their heart."[1] God waits not till we come to Him, but hears our first sigh for help, anticipates our wants, and draws near to us with a remedy

[1] Ps. ix. 17.

and support for all our needs and trials. He wills but that we speak to Him, and instantly makes known to us that He is by our side to hearken and console us.

God, the omnipotent Creator, is everywhere present, but He has nevertheless two habitations where it specially pleases Him to dwell. The first is heaven, where He is the glory of the Angels and Saints. The second is the holy and humble soul, where He holds His earthly court, adorning it with graces, sanctifying it through the mysterious workings of His Spirit, changing its wilderness into an earthly paradise. "Who dwelleth in the high and holy place, and with a contrite and humble spirit."[1]

Nor is it any marvel that God should dwell with greater delight in a faithful soul than in any other place on earth, because, next to the angels, such a being is the crowning glory of His power, and the most noble product of His Divinity, and is therefore nigher to Him than any other created object. Saint Bernard, meditating on this, exclaims, "Christian, know thine own excellence"; and holy Job yearns over his former joys of communion with God, saying: "When

[1] Isa. lvii. 15.

God was secretly in my tabernacle, when the Almighty was with me."[1]

God is ever with thee, O Christian soul, thy one and only friend, who will never fail thee nor forsake thee. From earthly friends thou mayest be separated, but from Him never; He is thy strong and faithful Lover. He goeth not down with the sun, but in the darkness is ever close to thee, speaking to thee in the watches of the night, that thy sleep may be sanctified and made sweet by His secret Presence; in the morning He stands by thee, waiting for thy confidence, that He may share with thee the burden of the day. And as He will not fail thee at thy waking hour, do thou as thou awakenest ever turn thine eyes towards Him and stretch out thine arms to Him. Say to Him with the prophet of old, "My soul hath desired thee in the night."[2] O Divine Master, Thou knowest that I would be wholly Thine; for Thou seest that in my waking thoughts I rejoice in Thy love, and ever thank thee that Thou hast not withdrawn Thyself afar off, as my sins have deserved.

No; in very truth, He is nearer than aught else to the soul that loves Him. Be not thou therefore like to the multitude whose days and

[1] Job xxix. 4, 5 [2] Isa. xxvi. 9.

hours slip by regardless of Him. If thou hast but a little love, thou wilt have whereof to speak to Him and words wherewith to speak. "Desire of Him to direct thy ways, and that all thy counsels may abide in Him."[1] Speak to Him of thy family, tell Him thine anxieties, thy joys, the virtues thou needest, the vices thou must root out; show Him all thy needs, and the needs of others. For although through His Omniscience He knoweth all these things, yet He willeth to hear of them from thee, that His love and thy love, His interests and thine may in everything be identified.

IV.—For thou must take note that God wills as it were to be ignorant of all that is not told to Him in loving confidence, of all that makes not for His glory and His love. He sees not the tears of insincere penitents; He declares with a holy oath that He knows not hardened sinners: "Amen, I say to you, I know you not."[2] In like manner, He wills to ignore some matters; for if thou speakest not to Him of thine affairs, of them He will know nothing; and if thou dost not consult Him, it will befall to thee as to the Israelites, who were beaten in battle with great loss because they had not asked counsel of the

[1] Job iv. 20. [2] Matt. xxv. 12.

Lord. "They consulted not the mouth of the Lord."[1]

V. Say not therefore that the King of kings will not condescend to know the affairs of a lowly household, nor give ear to the sighs of a creature of earth.

It is true, says Saint Chrysostom, that in heaven, God, majestic over creation, accomplishes the designs of His wisdom and His holiness; but within thee His only care is for thee and for thine interests; when thou art alone with God, He exists as it were for thee alone; He is mighty that He may come to thine assistance; His charity burns that thou mayest love Him in return. Therefore, O holy soul, if aught go against thee, or thy good name be injured, keep not sullen silence, but go at once to God; tell Him thy sorrows with humility and reverence; and if thy faith be strong, thou needest not save to lay before Him thy trouble and tell Him all that thou sufferest. Say to Him: "Behold, Lord, I am in distress; my heart is turned within me; I am full of bitterness."[2] "Lord, all my desire is before Thee, and my groaning is not hidden from Thee."[3] "O my God, I am overwhelmed with bitterness, and encompassed with thick

[1] Josh. ix. 14. [2] Lam. i. 20. [3] Ps. xxxvii. 10.

darkness. I have no words with which to come before Thee, but Thou seest my sorrows and my tears, and wilt have mercy upon me; for Thou knowest that my hope is in Thee alone." He loves that thou shouldest cast thyself into His Arms, and pour out thy complaints of the weakness or ingratitude of creatures. "My friends are full of words; mine eye poureth out tears to God."[1]

VI.—Thy loving Lord is also well pleased that thou shouldest confess thy faults to Him directly thou hast committed them, and before thou approachest the tribunal of penance. Tell Him what has befallen thee; say to Him in David's words: "I have sinned very much in what I have done; I have done exceeding foolishly."[2] "O my God, I have sinned with my tongue"; or, "I have committed an unworthy action and brought about much harm. I know not how I became so blinded that I fell into this sin; I am filled with sorrow and confusion; and my grief is that I have offended Thee. But if I have fallen and wandered from Thee, Thou art not less merciful, less tender-hearted towards my sadness; for Thou art the same yesterday,

[1] Job xvi. 21.
[2] 2 Kings xxiv. 10.

to-day and for ever, full of compassion, merciful and long-suffering.

"And because I know that Thou willest not that I should give myself up to sadness, and by ceasing to hope in Thee lose all my courage, I can but humble myself and mourn before Thee, acknowledging my great misery."

VII.—Be not troubled and anxious concerning the small faults into which thou fallest almost continually; but set before Thy Lord that He alone is holy, and that thou art but a sinner with a weak and wayward nature, and as a little child art prone to constant falls, whereby God is not angered, because in His fatherly love He is willing to remember that they are for the most part the result of thoughtlessness.

"O my God, I am Thy little creature whom Thou bearest in Thine Arms, whom Thou leadest as a child by the hand. When I fall, remember that Thou art perfect Love, and forget not the compassion that Thine infinite kindness demands of Thee. I confess that Thou hast great cause for complaint against me, because in spite of all Thy graces and my good resolutions I fall again and again; but, Lord, do thou stretch out Thine Hand to me who

weep and lament for my sins; take me to Thy Breast that Thou mayest wipe away my tears; calm my fears and dispel my scruples; say to my soul that Thou art my God and ever lovest me.

"Thou knowest that I was conceived and born in sin, that I have inherited a nature full of corruption and evil inclinations. What wonder then that it is so weak and so liable to fall?

"I ask not that my sins should not offend Thy perfect purity, and I myself detest them, and am heartily sorry for them; therefore to Thee I turn, O merciful Saviour, while my guilt is fresh upon me, and contemplate Thee stripped and dying on the Cross that Thou mightest seek all sinners, and, finding them, cleanse them in Thy Blood. At Thy Feet I lie, O ineffable Mercy; am not I one of the very sinners whom Thou seekest? O cast me not away, for I am brought very low; nor have I any hope save in Thee, Who alone art infinitely good."

VIII.—Fail not, O Christian soul, when difficulties arise, and the circumstances of thy life perplex thee, to turn for light and guidance to that faithful Friend Who Himself is very Wisdom, and Who is ever ready to help thee

with His counsel. Say, like holy Judith, "Put Thou words in my mouth, and strengthen the resolution in my heart."[1] "O my God, teach and enlighten me; make known to me what I should say or do at this crisis: show me whose advice I should follow: let me not be confused by many counsellors, but teach me Thy Will and give me grace to do it. If Thou wilt be my great light in the midst of darkness, I shall not err, but in all things shall act wisely and do well."

IX.—Neither fear thou to complain to God and even to reproach Him lovingly if thou art overwhelmed by misfortune, or seemest to be bereft of consolation. Appeal to His compassion in that He hath seemed to forsake Thee and to despise Thy prayers and tears. "O Lord, why hast Thou retired afar off? Why dost Thou slight us in our wants, in the time of trouble?"[2] "I cry to Thee, and Thou hearest me not: I stand up, and Thou dost not regard me. Thou art changed to be cruel toward me, and in the hardness of Thy hand Thou art against me."[3] "Why hast Thou cast me off? Why do I go sorrowful whilst the enemy afflicteth me?"[4] "O loving Saviour,

[1] Judith ix. 18.
[2] Ps. x. 1.
[3] Job xxx. 20, 21.
[4] Ps. xlii. 2.

where is Thy mercy? where is Thine infinite charity? I cry to Thee, and Thou hearest not; yea, Thou seemest to turn away Thine eyes lest Thou shouldest be moved to compassion and succour me."

But in the same breath wherein thou tenderly reproachest thy Lord, do thou assure Him of thy confidence and humble trust, saying to Him, "But yet Thou stretchest not forth Thy Hand to their consumption."[1] Yea Lord, I know that beyond all things Thou willest that I be not lost to Thee; in Thy love and for my good I suffer: and the more I suffer the more plainly I discern Thy love for me: I know that Thou wilt not let me fall into the hands of Thine enemies and mine; therefore I readily and joyfully submit myself to Thy blessed Will, since all that Thou willest for me is of love.

Thus, holy soul, shalt thou find great ease in thy sufferings, and shalt be filled with marvellous consolation.

X.—Be not so full of care for thyself and thine own troubles that thou hast no thought for the sorrows of others; but tell these also to thy loving Lord; beg of Him that consolations and graces may flow forth from

[1] Job xxx. 24.

His Sacred Heart for all sorrowful souls; ask of Him the conversion of sinners. Say to Him: "Dear Master, wherever I go I perceive sorrow and tears. I am filled with sadness because I cannot console those who suffer. It would indeed be displeasing to Thee and a very heinous fault if I should feel no compassion for the burdens of others; I am grieved and distressed that I cannot lighten them. Therefore, even as the friends of the sick and poor plead for them at the hands of the rich and prosperous, so do I turn to Thee, my Well-beloved, and stretch forth my hands to Thee, that Thou wouldest grant to Thy poor out of the riches of Thy bounty all that they need of grace and of consolation; and at Thy feet I would lie in adoration, humbly waiting till Thou grant to me on their behalf some favour and assistance. Thou hast taught us that what is done unto one of the least of our brethren is done unto Thee; 'grant to us what Thou commandest, and command what Thou wilt.'[1] 'Give to me then the assistance which Thou willest that I should give to them, that I may no longer see Thee suffering in Thy needy ones.'"

XI.—But let us consider how often we for-

[1] Saint Augustine.

get God in times of ease and prosperity, while we have frequent recourse to Him in distress.

Is it not strange that though we rejoice to tell our good news to all our friends, and find our greatest pleasure in their sympathy, we should not care to speak of it to God, and so lose the truest and most abiding part of our pleasure?

Confide to Him then not thy sorrows only; but if thou receivest some happy tidings, or some good fortune befall thee, play the part of a friend towards Him; delay not to make Him a sharer in thy joy, telling Him that thy happiness is so much the greater in that thou knowest it to come from His Fatherly Hand. "Therefore my heart hath been glad, and my tongue hath rejoiced; in the Lord will I rejoice; I will sing to the Lord Who giveth me good things."[1]

So shall thy joy be increased twofold; it shall be made both purer and more abiding.

Do thou show to thy Spouse every portion of thine house, and all thy treasure and thy riches, for they are His gifts. "In our gates are all fruits; the new and the old, my beloved, I have

[1] Ps. xv. 9; xii. 6.

kept for Thee."[1] Say to Him: "Behold, O my Well-beloved, how great wealth I have amassed by Thy love and generosity. For wheresoever I cast my eyes, I see great abundance and many gifts and blessings. And all these things hast Thou given me, O my Spouse, Who art the Author of all earthly good; and all this I receive at Thy Hands, that I may both offer to Thee my praises and thanksgivings, and also give back Thine own to Thee in the person of Thy poor.

"O Lord, Thou willest that we use Thy gifts; but to Thee be all the praise, to Thee all thanks. I desire, in rejoicing in Thy gifts, not to cling to them for their own sakes, but rather to receive them humbly, loving only the Giver. O my God, grant me to love Thee only; be Thou the God of my heart, and my portion for ever."[2]

XII.—The interior trials of a Christian are infinitely more painful and hard to bear than any others; but in these God Himself is the Divine Consoler. Nevertheless the peculiar tendency of such trials is so to cast down the soul and overwhelm it with the sense of its own misery, that it is withheld from seeking refuge in God, Who alone can succour it.

[1] Cant. vii. 13. [2] Ps. lxxvii. 26.

For when it is in these straits it torments itself with endless lamentations and imaginings, believing itself to be under the displeasure of God. It does not see, as did the prophet of old, that this chastening is for its sanctification; and becomes so discouraged that it gazes on God as from afar, and makes no effort to return to Him. Therefore it may be helpful to suggest some ways by which such a condition may be turned to profit, and be made a way of advancement in holiness.

1. At such times we must neglect neither our duties nor our devotions, but faithfully perform all that God requires of us. For however distasteful and difficult they may be, they are always well done if the suffering is borne in the Presence of God, and offered up to Him; and a soul that suffers in union with His Will is a sacrifice worthy of Him.

2. We should remember that God will hereafter give to us a full measure of consolation for all that we have suffered here in darkness and desolation.

3. We should submit ourselves in entire content to God's good pleasure, as being an instrument of the providence by which He works out His perfect Will.

4. We must hope, even against hope,

that He will be glorified by our miseries, and that our salvation will be furthered by what would almost seem to be our ruin, if we will but strive to resist temptation, especially to impatience and discouragement.

5. We shall do well to remind ourselves constantly of God's goodness towards us, and to this end we may repeat to ourselves such words of Holy Scripture as will encourage us to greater confidence in Him; as, for example, "God is faithful, Who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able;"[1] or, "The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a contrite heart, and He will save the humble of spirit;"[2] or, "Because thou wast acceptable to God, it was necessary that temptation should prove thee."[3] For in truth the soul that is such as to be received into the Divine Heart must be tried in the fire of humiliation, that it may thereby become a burnt-offering worthy of His love. By consecrating ourselves to His service and offering ourselves as a sacrifice to Him we do Him the greatest honour that lies in our power; and if on earth we do His Will, it is very certain that He will be our joy and our glory in heaven.

[1] Cor. x. 13. [2] Ps. xxxiii. 19. [3] Job xii. 13.

Such considerations, although most true and reasonable, do not always afford sensible consolation to a troubled soul; but if without this it humbles itself before God and patiently suffers His Will, it will be sanctified through its sorrows.

Therefore, O Christian soul, if, as so frequently happens, thou feelest dry and distracted in devotion, and prayer becomes distasteful to thee, if thou art beset by temptations, and filled with bitterness and discouragement, yet understandest not the cause of thine own weariness and distress, then pour out thy complaint before God, saying to Him, "Now my soul fadeth within myself, and the days of affliction possess me."[1] "O my God, I cannot tell Thee how it is with me, nor how I feel; my soul is filled with loathing, and finds satisfaction in nothing; and most of all am I disgusted and wearied with myself. O my God, I would even say to Thee if I dared that Thou art no longer pleasing to me, since Thou canst not draw from me any aspiration of love or worship. For my prayers have been full of imperfections, and a deadly sloth has taken hold of me. When I have come into Thy Presence I have done Thee no

[1] Job xxx. 16.

honour, for I have been unable to overcome my distractions and my weariness of flesh and spirit." "My heart is troubled, my strength hath left me, and the light of my eyes itself is not with me."[1] "And with the light of my eyes, all my strength for good seems to have forsaken me. I know not whence it is that I am ill at ease with Thee; that I am obstinately impelled to break Thy holy laws; that my evil inclinations as a rushing torrent sweep me along against my will. My former sins have risen up against me; old habits of evil which I thought were conquered have reasserted themselves imperiously, and the sinful passions which seemed dead have revived, so that I am weak and sick unto death. O Lord, how is it that mine enemies are so strong against me after Thou hast so often given me grace to conquer them? I know not nor understand how these things can be; all that I know is that Thou canst save if Thou wilt look upon me and speak to me. O Lord, speak, and Thy servant shall be healed; look upon me and I shall live, and shall be filled with new grace and courage; say but the word, and the storm shall cease, and there shall be a great calm.

[1] Ps. xxxvii. 11.

Remember, O merciful Lord, that of myself I can do nothing, for in myself I am but weakness and misery. O Lord, to whom shall I go? To whom shall I turn but to Thee, my strength and my only hope; for who save Thee will fight on my side and deliver me out of the hands of my enemies?"

XIII.—The vexations and annoyances of life are perhaps the most frequent source of our loss of peace, often because we are unprepared for them and think them inopportune; but if we are firmly resolved to suffer all for God, and deem ourselves worthy of nothing but suffering both here and hereafter, we shall never be surprised nor disquieted by contradictions or persecutions, however unkind and unreasonable; and neither avoiding nor resenting them as so many do, shall rather prize them as precious opportunities sent direct from God for our increase of patience and submission.

In the same way we should welcome bodily ills, which Saint Gregory calls the merciful torments of God's chastisements, and the pledges of His love.

For at such times the sense of God's Fatherly Charity so predominates in the soul, that justice seems to be entirely tempered with

mercy. And the soul that is steeped in the Presence of God so consciously recognises the equity of His chastisement, that it both humbles itself beneath His Hand and also suffers with greater ease and increased merit. Neither does it submit in sullen silence, but with child-like confidence opens its heart to God, saying to Him: "O my God, Thou canst cure me if Thou wilt; Thou art the Physician alike of body and soul. Say but the word, and I shall be made whole. Cast upon me one look of pity, and I shall be filled with joy.

"I need not to say with the woman in the Gospel, 'If I shall but touch the hem of His garment I shall be whole'; for to me it is granted to say: 'If I am so happy as to receive my Lord and God in the adorable Sacrament of His love, I shall fear neither bodily sickness nor the attacks of my visible enemies.' O my God, if I ask health at Thy Hands, let it be in such measure as Thou wilt, that I may use it for Thy love and service and for Thy glory in my salvation and that of my fellow-men. But if Thou seest that I should misuse it, do Thou in Thy good pleasure chastise me and strip me now that Thou mayest pardon me hereafter; pierce this sinful flesh with Thine arrows, that I may be moved to

make reparation for my past sins, and may be preserved from future relapse. Let me suffer all that Thou wilt, so Thou grant me grace to suffer patiently. Father, into Thy Hands I commend my spirit."

XIV.—But there are other circumstances of a very different nature, not less harassing, and equally opposed to the spirit of recollection; when cares and burdens overwhelm us and threaten to distract us from the thought of God; when, like holy Martha, we must give our mind to many things, and may not share the joy of Mary, for how can it be possible at such times to sit at the feet of Jesus and listen to His words?

But be sure, O faithful soul, that thou canst indeed make this joy thine own; that thou canst not more greatly deceive thyself than by imagining that thou art forced to forget God by reason of the duties which He Himself has laid upon thee: for if thou speakest often of thy business to those whom thou meetest in the world, why not to thy Well-beloved, Who as thy most faithful friend, can give thee the most effectual help?

Listen to the words of the Spouse who toils for her Beloved, and ask thyself whether the tranquillity of contemplation is more pleasing

to Him than the labours of this blessed housewife. "Let us get up early to the vineyard; let us see if the vineyard flourish, if the flowers be ready to bring forth fruits, if the pomegranates flourish."[1] "O dearest Master," she would say, "let us rise at dawn, for it is time to work and to care for the household; but leave me not alone; I fear not the cares if they keep me not from Thee, if while I work Thou holdest mine eyes and keepest my heart one with Thy Sacred Heart. Let us go together around our grounds, let us tend the vines and the trees, and see if the saplings grow: let us take note of the labourers and the husbandmen, whether they are faithful in their duty; let us look to it that each is at his post, so that Thine estate which Thou hast entrusted to me may be in order as Thou wouldest have it."

For in truth so soon as we call upon God during our work, it becomes no longer a distraction, but a devotion of great beauty and merit.

If in the pressure of work we can learn to be in touch with God we shall rejoice to labour with Him and to grow weary with Him, for our hearts will go out to Him in loving

[1] Cant. vii. 12.

thoughts of reverence and resignation, of love and gratitude; and if we do not experience as much sweetness as do contemplatives, we shall assuredly have not less merit. One whose thoughts are ever with God through a morning of errands in the town, is more pleasing to Him than another who spends the same time filled with distractions in the oratory.

XV.—It is a grievous error to suppose that we sin against reverence and submission through speaking freely and unreservedly to God. Little do they understand of His greatness, which is so much the more sublime and incomprehensible, because He is both greater than all, and equal in all, as says one of the Fathers of the Church; whence it follows that the greatness of God surpasses all other greatness, because, while it is above and beyond everything else, it is also contained in the smallness of the smallest creature, and exists as wholly in every flower as in the heaven of heavens.

By this we know that God is both the true and only object of love, and also more worthy of our love than all others who love us or are loved by us, in that He alone satisfies the twofold requirement of perfect love: for He alone is both supremely great and absolutely

kind; so great that He is immeasurably above us; so kind that He stoops to our lowest depths, that thereby His highest perfection and good may enter into our poor hearts, and fill us with joy eternal and infinite.

God is our Lord and Master; He makes Himself as it were our equal; of Him only can we say with truth, "My Beloved to me and I to Him."[1] "Although He is God and I am nothing, yet by an ineffable mystery He is mine and I am His; for His wisdom has taken to itself my misery and has given my littleness power to hold within itself His greatness."

XVI.—Come then before Him, O Christian soul, in His sanctuary, and at the offering of the Divine Sacrifice, as but a shadow and nothingness in thine abasement: but in thine hours of business and leisure, in joy and sorrow, in sickness and in health, and in thy lighter moments, be not ungrateful towards Him, but speak to Him with the reverent and sweet familiarity of a loving spouse, who speaks no language save that of love; for then He will delight to call thee His well-beloved, His dove, and will not permit thee to call Him Master and Lord. "She shall call me, 'My husband,' and she shall call me no

[1] Cant. ii. 16

more 'Baali.'" [1] "Thou shalt call me," He says, "the God of thine heart and of thy consolations, Father of mercies, sole Hope and Desire, alone worthy to be loved, and sole Perfection; yea, thou shalt call me thine All, Whose Heart is inseparably one with thine, Whose favour and love are thy life, thy joy, thy only happiness."

In such tender and intimate communion, it were well that thou shouldest not speak further of thyself and thine own matters, but rather of what appertains to Him,—of His blessedness, His greatness, His Divine attributes, of creation and all His marvellous work. Speak thou of them, after the example of many holy souls, in the most fervent aspirations and ejaculations: "O Wisdom, Who hast made the universe, how sublime, how incomprehensible are Thy thoughts. How wonderful art Thou in Thy works: there is none like unto Thee. How full of glory and beauty are the creations of Thy Hands, the sky, the earth, the sea, and the life and wealth which they contain." "Thy power and Thy justice, O God, are even to the highest; great things hast Thou done: O God, who is like to Thee?" [2] "How blessed are we when our souls are fixed on

[1] Os. ii. 16. [2] Ps. lxx. 19.

Thee in silent adoring contemplation, when our hearts overflow with gratitude towards Thee."

XVII.—Neglect not to dwell much upon that miracle of miracles, the Incarnation of the Word and man's redemption. Let thy Lord know it for the constant subject of thy meditation, even as the Saints and Angels ever rejoice to contemplate it. "O Lord Jesus Christ, my Redeemer, what more blessed consolation can I have than to behold the humiliations of my Lord, in the manger, upon the Cross, and in the most holy Sacrament of the Altar."

Recall all that thou hast heard or read or thought on these mysteries, which shall be most pleasing to His love. Repeat to Him these things, with many acts of faith and adoration, of love and gratitude. "Jesus Christ crucified is my Saviour and my God; His Name the first on my childish lips, the last, as I would fain hope, upon my deathbed. May this be graven on my heart: 'Dominus meus et Deus meus.' 'My Lord and my God.'"[1]

XVIII.—Say to Him with great contrition that on the Cross thou discernest not more thine own shame and thy deepest source of self-abasement than the amazing results of the Divine justice and love. Implore Him

[1] John xx. 28.

not to remember the sins and offences of thy youth.[1] "O my Beloved, it is my greatest shame and sorrow that I cannot hate as I should my many and grievous sins; the grief of my own heart alone makes but poor reparation for them; I would that I possessed every human heart, that I might feel the bitterness and the sorrow which my offences deserve, and hate them as they should be hated."

XIX.—This desire is well-pleasing to the Divine Saviour, even as was that of David, of Saint Peter, and of many other saints, who, when they had wept over their sins for many years, longed that they might have within them a perpetual fount of tears, wherewith to mourn; even as Jeremias says: "Who will give water to my head, and a fountain of tears to my eyes, that I may weep night and day?"[2] "O my God, would that with Thy Blood my tears could ever flow, so that all that have seen my evil life might also behold my sorrow." 'Behold, O Lord, my affliction; see, O Lord, and consider, for I am become vile.'[3]

"O God, look mercifully upon my grief, and turn not away Thine Ear from my lamentations.

"For I am filled with sorrow and can find

[1] Ps. xxiv. 7. [2] Jer. ix. 1. [3] Lam. i. 9, 11.

no consolation when I remember that although because of Thy great goodness Thou hast forgiven my sins and hast cleansed me from every stain, yet Thou must still remember them. How can I abide in Thy Presence, Who hast beheld all my unfaithfulness, and must ever carry with Thee the remembrance of my evil deeds? For Thou markest all our iniquities, and searchest our lives with the brightness of Thy rays. 'Thou hast set our iniquities before Thine eyes, and our life in the light of Thy Countenance.'"[1]

But God, Who knows our griefs, has also anticipated our healing; and has spoken consolation to us by the mouth of His prophet, declaring to us that the memory of our sins shall be done away, in that "He will put away all our iniquities, and will cast all our sins into the bottom of the sea, because He delighteth in mercy."[2]

XX.—Therefore if thou shouldest be troubled and affrighted, fearing thyself guilty of some secret sin, or under the condemnation of God, be very wrathful against thyself, and reprove thyself for this anxiety, as for a fault that may be more displeasing to His Wisdom and mercy than all thy other sins; be ashamed

[1] Ps. lxxxix. 8. [2] Mich. vii. 19, 18.

and confounded: and be filled with hatred of so great blindness and so unfilial a spirit. In like manner, if scruples or terrors arise in thy heart, so that thou begin to fear the power of men or the malice of devils, and thus be tempted to despair, beware greatly lest thou be cast down by the pressure of this attack. Open thine eyes and consider well how unworthy thou makest thyself of the love of thy God, in that thou art terrified by shadows and imaginings while God Himself surrounds thee, protecting thee by His power and sheltering thee by His grace at the very moment when thou art overcome by cowardice and fear.

"O my Beloved, how great is my blindness! Whence comes this anxiety, so insulting to Thy love and mercy? I am indeed but a sinner and the dust of the ground; but Thou art a God of love, and the mighty Protector of the weak. Dost Thou not say to me: 'Be comforted, O creature of my Hand, beloved of my Heart, and fear not: for though thou art but a worm of earth, fit only to be crushed under foot, yet am I thy Deliverer, thy Well-beloved, and thy faithful Friend, Who have sworn that I would sooner the world should come to an end than that thy soul should perish'?"

O mighty Love, speakest Thou not peace to me? Dost Thou not tell me that Thou bearest me in Thy bosom as a mother her infant, and as a father tenderly supportest me; that Thou wilt carry me all the days of my life, even to old age and death. "Even to your old age I am the same, and to your grey hairs I will carry you: I have made you and I will bear: I will carry and save."[1] "How then can I ask Thee doubtingly if Thou lovest me or hast regard to me, if Thou seest my tears and hearkenest to my voice? How dare I mistrust Thee and fear that Thou shouldest fail me as though Thou wert a weak and fickle man? Behold, Lord, I hate and renounce my unfaithfulness; hereafter I will fear nothing but to sin against Thee; in Thee shall be all my hope, Thou alone shalt be the love of my heart."

And that thy confidence may be strengthened, and thy consolation increased, do thou often call to mind the chief blessings of thy life, when God has showed special mercy towards thee; recount them often to Him, remembering that there are three things of which He loves to hear thee speak: of thy grief for sin, of His redemption, and of His

[1] Isa. xlvi. 4.

loving care for thee, more especially when without it thou wouldest have been lost and have perished for ever.

"O my God, it is Thy Hand that has saved me; Thou hast preserved me from death; Thou hast dried my tears and broken my bonds. Thou hast pardoned my ingratitude and cured my ills. Thou hast restored to me the joy of my health, and hast filled my soul with peace, crowning me with blessings and loving-kindness; Thou hast showed Thy word to me, revealing to me Thy deep and hidden mysteries, Thou hast brought me back from the gates of hell, and hast raised me from misery to make me sit with saints and angels. 'Bless the Lord, O my soul, and never forget all that He hath done for thee.'"[1]

XXI.—And although in thine intercourse with God it seemeth that He answers thee not in any way perceptible to thy senses, yet He does indeed speak in a language which is His alone, teaching thee of the things which His love wills thee to know, and causing His truth to sink deep into thy soul. For thoughts of peace and consolation steal unawares into thy heart, and the light shines in upon thy doubts and perplexities, so that

[1] Ps. cii. 2.

difficulties solve themselves and the way is made plain. Great indeed is the condescension of God, that He should vouchsafe to listen to thee; but greater still that He should not fail to repay thy humble confidence both by answering thy prayer and by granting to thee such consolation as shall be for thy spiritual good, not indeed with words, but through an interior spiritual language known and understood by every soul that serves Him faithfully and is on fire with His love.

XXII.—It is most true that this Divine language belongs not at all to the exterior order of things, neither is it to be perceived by the senses nor comprehended of those who live not spiritually. If we would understand it well, we must be detached from things of sense and live an interior life, even as we must be spiritual if we would know and understand spiritual things.

Therefore it necessarily follows that all Christians should be persons of prayer and interior recollection; which truth our Lord Jesus Christ willed to impress upon us when He said, "The hour cometh, and now is, when the true adorers shall adore the Father in spirit and in truth."[1] If then this, being

[1] John iv. 23.

the word of Him Who is truth, be wholly true, those who adore not God in spirit are false adorers. Alas! of how many must this be said, who make no secret of their repulsion and annoyance when they are reminded that God requires of them interior and spiritual service; some, as if it were beneath them and unworthy of their dignity, others as if they considered it out of the question to aim so high, chiefly because they think it would cost them too much. Both these classes of persons labour under a great mistake in deeming an interior life unnecessary for salvation; for such an idea is contrary to the whole aim of the Gospel, which is to transform man into a spiritual being.

This is evident from the example of Jesus Christ and of His Saints; for He lived on earth a hidden interior life; and the Catholic Church has ever accounted His followers holy in exact proportion to their interior spirituality.

Moreover, those that have lived this hidden life know well that it is neither irksome nor unpleasant, as the world believes, but is rather the very source and spring of all peace, sweetness, and consolation.

What then is this interior life? How is

it to be lived? How may Christians in every state of life become spiritual and interior?

XXIII.—Between the natural or exterior life and the spiritual or interior life there is a close analogy. The natural life has two parts—(1) the union of soul and body; (2) the actual living of the life and using of the faculties and senses, and of all that facilitates communication with other beings.

The spiritual life consists likewise (1) of the union of the soul with God; (2) of the practical using of that life which is the spiritual counterpart of the life of the senses, in looking upon God, listening to Him, speaking to Him in the heart and holding constant and blessed intercourse with Him.

We are not now concerned with that ordinary union with God which consists in being in a state of grace, not separated from Him by mortal sin, but rather of the deeper union with Him which is maintained by perseverance in the interior life.

For just as natural enjoyment consists in the exercise of the bodily powers and functions, and as a man who was deaf, blind, and dumb would be regarded not only as miserable, but even as in a state of living death because of his loss of natural pleasure, so a soul in a state

of grace will be not only very imperfect, but in grave danger of spiritual death, if it neglects to use and develop its powers, by speaking to God, listening to Him, and holding familiar converse with Him. Why is it so common for Christians, after having been made one with God in a union which should be everlasting, to be constantly falling back into mortal sin, thus separating themselves wholly from Him? Is it not because they think so little of God Who dwells in their hearts, and are not faithful or persevering in prayer and in listening to His Voice? How many are content to give to God but a passing thought when they kneel for prayer or approach the Sacraments, and immediately betake themselves to their worldly imaginings and interests, with hardly one further glance towards Him. Is it any wonder that promises made to God and to His priest are so lightly broken, and the Sacraments so greatly abused? And is it not evident that this evil arises from neglect of the interior life?

But not alone are sinners thus blinded; for many souls there are who, while committing no grievous sin, yet sink through carelessness into this condition, and so make no spiritual progress. These are indeed as the

blind and deaf and dumb, who live, yet cannot enjoy nor profit by their life.

Is not a soul blind, that spends days together without looking upon the God Who dwells within it? Is it not deaf if it knows not His Voice nor listens for the word that He would speak to it? Is it not dumb if it knows not the language of love, and has no words wherewith to commune with Him? Therefore it is that many souls live with God, yet know not His Love nor realise His Presence, so that they are as earthly-minded and as spiritually weak after years of this life of so-called piety as they were at the beginning, and abide in a state of great imperfection.

Let it then be well understood, that all Christians may and must aspire to an interior life; and this would be more easily apprehended if it were realised that all that is needed is to change the object of the soul's desires; to restrain our affections from restless wanderings, and gradually to bring ourselves into a state of recollection, our vision turned inwards rather than outwards, so that we may more often and more perfectly contemplate God, and listen to His Voice.

And does not our loving Lord invite us to

enter into ourselves that we may find in Him our rest and consolation? Does He not say to us: "Come to me, all you that labour, and are burdened, and I will refresh you"?[1] and: "Behold, I stand at the gate, and knock. If any man shall hear My voice, and open to Me the door, I will come into him and sup with him, and he with Me."[2] For this mysterious supper is nothing else than that blessed converse which God wills to hold with each one of His children; the true food of the soul and the delicious banquet for which we should so greatly long; that we may be among those of whom the Lord speaks, saying, "Not in bread alone doth man live, but in every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God."[3] And if we rejoice not in these consolations, let us blame but our own pride; because the humble alone are worthy to partake of this heavenly feast. For He who is the Truth has said, "I confess to Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them to little ones."[4] Pride it is indeed which hinders us most strongly from the interior life and from prayer and meditation on things Divine; for we are

[1] Matt. xi. 28.
[2] Apoc. iii. 20.
[3] Matt. iv. 4.
[4] Matt. xi. 25.

so self-reliant and so full of ourselves that we have but little faith and loyalty towards God.

If we would be yet more firmly convinced of the need of an interior life of prayer, let us consider the saying of our Divine Lord, "The kingdom of God is within you."[1] Does He not will to teach us by this, as so often elsewhere in the Holy Gospels, that the throne of God is within the recesses of our hearts, where He wills that we adore Him and serve Him? How shall we do this without prayer and recollection? Where shall we find our true inheritance, the true peace and consolation of the Christian life, save within ourselves and through perseverance in prayer?

Further, our Lord desires us to understand that the practice of recollection is the royal road to self-conquest and to perfect obedience to God's holy laws. So only shall we learn to say in truth: "I have run the way of Thy commandments, when Thou didst enlarge my heart."[2] Those who lead lives of prayer do more than run they fly swiftly in the service of God; their constant experience telling them that when they are faithful to prayer, even for a short time, they are greatly helped

[1] Luke xvii. 1. [2] Ps. iii. 32.

and strengthened to do God's Will, and His yoke is made light and easy to them.

The practice of prayer and recollection, which brings with it a vivid, reverent, and loving sense of God's Presence, will effect in us a gradual change of the whole nature, whereby the old Adam will die and the new man be formed in us; we shall become spiritual adorers of God and fiery lovers of Jesus Christ, Whose example we shall strive to imitate in all things; we shall be preserved from lukewarmness and a life of merely natural virtue, which is well enough for a pagan who knows not God, but wholly unworthy of a Christian. In such a life there is much natural reasoning, little faith and no holiness, because they who live thus tread not in God's way of sanctification, which is by prayer and meditation upon His holy Presence. But we shall be incited to desire, and strengthened to attain to, those supernatural virtues which are contrary to the natural man and splendid above the light of reason, and which are the glory of the Christian; even humility, detachment, patience, gentleness, charity towards enemies, mortification of the senses, hatred of self, and deep sorrow for sin.

God called Abraham to this supernatural

life, that he might be the father and the example of many saints; saying to him, "Walk before me, and be perfect."[1]

Of Moses it is recorded that while in great affliction, "he endured as seeing Him that is invisible."[2]

By the mouth of David God says: "I will give thee understanding, and I will instruct thee in this way in which thou shalt go; I will fix thee with mine eye."[3]

From holy Judith we learn how to overcome our enemies; for when in act to slay Holofernes, she cried to the Lord, saying, "Strengthen me, O Lord God, at this hour."[4]

Likewise did the Machabees under similar circumstances call upon God, saying, "How shall we be able to stand before their faces unless Thou, O God, help us?"[5]

[1] Gen. xvii. 1.
[2] Heb. xi. 27.
[3] Ps. xxxi. 8.
[4] Judith xiii. 9.
[5] 1 Mach. iii. 53.

CHAPTER II

Of Mental Prayer, which is the surest Way to attain to the Practice of the Presence of God.

If, then, prayer is both so needful and so great a good, and if the habit of prayer can only be gained by the practice of prayer, it is much to be wished that all Christians should set apart a certain time in the day for mental prayer, or meditation. By persevering in this holy exercise we should assuredly gain a spirit of calmness, evenness, and recollection; we should overcome the dissipation of soul which makes us shallow, restless, and impatient of control, and which is intrinsically opposed to progress in things spiritual. For since we see that no perfection in earthly learning is attained without practice, why should we expect to be able to detach our thoughts from

ordinary things and keep them fixed on God without persevering in mental prayer?

Such meditation tends more than anything else to keep the soul in silence and stillness before God, which is the aim of all prayer; so that the practice of mental prayer is quite as needful for those who by long habit have attained to recollection, as it is for beginners; for the loving attraction of our hearts towards God needs to be constantly renewed and increased, lest it lose its strength and elasticity as a spring which through use or lapse of time becomes gradually weakened. Nor are counter influences from within alone to be feared, for a heavy strain is put upon our power of recollection by the conflicting claims of our daily social life, thus creating an additional need that we should give ourselves to prayer for the interior work of restoration and strengthening.

Some persons may object that they find it no easier to fix their thoughts on God's presence during prayer than at any other time, because they do not know exactly what to meditate upon, nor how to think about God. This difficulty is not uncommon, and as it arises, more often than not, from ignorance as to the real nature of mental prayer, it may

be well to give a brief explanation of this devotion. This cannot be better done than in the words of Saint Theresa, herself a proficient in holy contemplation. She says: "I understand mental prayer to be the means by which we pledge ourselves to the faithful obedience of slaves, in carrying out the will of Him Who has shown us so much love." By this she means that when the hour of prayer is come, the mind and heart must be withdrawn from thought of all exterior things and from all desire except the will and service of God, and centred upon Him alone in that sweet and holy servitude which the Apostle calls the glorious liberty of the children of God.

Mental prayer gives us this great consolation, namely, that the mere effort to preserve ourselves recollectedly in God's Presence is accounted by Him as prayer. We may be tempted to give it up as idle and useless, because it is uncongenial to the natural man; but we shall not lightly forego it, nor shrink from some trouble and weariness in practising it, if we realise that God desires our hearts and is ever drawing us to Himself, that we may abide in His embrace. Neither shall we be thrown back if we do not experience joy and consolation in His Presence; for it will be

sufficient for us that He sees and knows us to be there for His sake and because we would be the slaves of His love, rather than for our own self-seeking; so that we shall be ready to suffer a hundredfold for His holy will and pleasure, in return for all His love. But, unfortunately, many souls are slow to realise that such waiting upon God in obedience and simplicity is a true prayer, and one very fruitful for their spiritual progress. Again, Saint Theresa says: "I regard mental prayer as the soul's expression of its love and confidence in God, and as its intimate conversation with Him, wherein it tells Him of its love for Him, and of its assurance of His love for it, and, thanks be to God, there is no single soul which is not capable of thus speaking to Him its inmost thoughts."

But some will answer, Such prayer is indeed most fit and blessed for faithful souls that have persevered long in God's service; but how can I, a sinner and an unprofitable servant, have the assurance of His love? How can I, who have no sense of love towards Him, assure Him of my love and devotion?

It would, however, be a fatal error to separate ourselves even in thought from the rest of the world which God so loved that He gave His

only-begotten Son for it.[1] What more could this adorable Son have done that He has not done, to prove His love for us? For love of us He became man, sharing our human miseries; for love of us He shed His Blood to redeem us; for love of us He gives Himself to be our daily Food in the most holy Sacrament of the Altar.

All these tokens of His love hath He given thee, O Christian soul. Are they not enough? Canst thou desire stronger proof? But if thou wilt have yet more, turn thine eyes in upon thyself, and see if thou find not there pledges innumerable which thou canst not forget without extreme ingratitude. Shouldest thou not sing with David and Theresa, "Misericordias Domini in æternum cantabo": "The mercies of the Lord will I sing for ever"?[2]

And not David and Saint Theresa only may come before God thus to assure Him of their confidence in His love, but every sinner, however vile, however conscious of deserving His wrath rather than His favour, if only he desire to return to Him with his whole heart.

Saint Theresa's definition of mental prayer as the soul's assurance of its love for God

[1] John iii. 16. [2] Ps. lxxviii. 1.

should be understood to mean that prayer is offered to Him in every practical proof of love shown to Him, every effort after detachment, every day's perseverance in habits of devotion and recollection; and this is the kind of prayer chiefly to be desired and prayed for, and which may be most perfectly practised when the soul is dry and without conscious or sensible love for God. For, when prayer is persevered in without any attraction to it or consolation in it, the soul gives indeed the truest proof of its desire to love Him; for then He is served at its cost, as Saint Theresa says, and with great merit.

Let us hear this great Saint speaking again on the same subject:—"Mental prayer consists only in understanding and considering what we say, and to whom we say it. Alas! who are we that we should dare to commune with so great a Lord? In these and kindred thoughts consists true mental prayer. Do not imagine anything else, nor be frightened by the name, as if it suggested some incomprehensible mystery."

These words should afford great consolation to those who find so great difficulty in that method of prayer usually called meditation, since we learn from them that prayer

needs not intricate reasoning, but only the thought of the greatness of God and of our own littleness, and careful attention to what we are saying. What could be easier or more within the reach of every one? And what more necessary for every one? For can we call that prayer which is but a careless repetition of words, without thought of God or of our duty towards Him?

But it will be said, If this be so, vocal prayers can be made into true prayer. Yes, assuredly, this both can and ought to be done; for vocal prayer cannot be called prayer at all, unless it is accompanied by the right dispositions of reverent attention, contrition, aspiration, and love.

If we consider the exceeding importance of our salvation and how much need there is for practical consideration of the means conducive thereto, we shall further realise our need of mental prayer. How shall we attain to the one end of our being? What are the peculiar hindrances to it in the circumstances of our life? Have we not temptations to resist, passions to mortify, evil habits to overcome? Shall we not find it worth while to give some time and thought to these things, that we may prostrate ourselves before God

and implore His aid? Is not this in itself an excellent method of mental prayer?

God forbid that there should be any persons so unrestrained and unrecollected as to continue in their stubbornness and folly, living only for natural things, taking no thought of Him, or of their bounden duty towards Him and their need for the increase within them of faith, hope, and charity; who care not for a spiritual life, the life of God within them, and who therefore take no pains to practise mental prayer or to acquire the habit of recollection; for not only will such Christians make no progress in holiness, but, because during life they shall have neglected the strait way which leads to God, they shall at the hour of death be in great peril of destruction.

But may the most holy and adorable Trinity so fill our hearts with the spirit of reverence and adoration, of love and gratitude for His unspeakable greatness and His innumerable mercies toward us, that our earthly life may be so entirely sanctified by Him and consecrated to Him in holy fear and love, that we may hereafter offer to Him worthy praise, adoration and thanks with Angels and Saints in heaven.

CHAPTER III

A Short Method of Mental Prayer.

MENTAL prayer is the aspiration of mind and heart to God, wherein to offer to Him homage, to lay before Him our needs, and to become thereby more faithful and devout Christians, to His greater glory. Mental prayer should consist, firstly, of the consideration of the mind; secondly, of the application of the affections; and thirdly, of the forming of holy resolutions.

To the end that these aims may be well and fruitfully accomplished, mental prayer should be divided into three parts: the preparation, the meditation itself, and the conclusion.

I

The preparation consists of three things:—

1. We must place ourselves in the Presence

of God with a firm act of faith; acknowledging Him to be present everywhere, and also in the place where we are, and within our hearts. Thus we shall be filled with reverence and shall approach Him in a spirit of humble adoration.

2. We must acknowledge our unworthiness to come before Him; asking pardon for our sins in a fervent act of contrition, and uniting ourselves with Jesus Christ, so that with Him and for His sake we may be made worthy to approach God the Father.

3. We must ask the light and assistance of the Holy Ghost, remembering that without Divine help we are wholly incapable of devout prayer or meditation.

II

In the actual meditation we should consider—

1. The subject on which we are about to meditate.

This will be something concerning God either in His Divinity or in the Person of the Incarnate Word, Jesus Christ our Lord; His revealed thoughts, His words, His actions on some occasion of His human life; offering

Him our adoration in acts of praise, love, and gratitude, with such aspirations of praise, joy, or compassion as we may be moved to by the subject of our contemplation.

2. Our own relation to the mystery which we have been considering.

We must strive to learn from the subject of the meditation what is needed for our own spiritual progress; what we should do and what we must avoid; and we must use all our energies to incite ourselves thereto. We should then examine ourselves as to whether we have corresponded with grace in the special matter under consideration; and if our conscience accuses us of having failed, we must humble ourselves and express our sorrow to God, imploring Him, by the merits of Jesus Christ, and through His intercession and that of His blessed Mother and the Saints, to give us grace to do better for the time to come.

3. Our resolution for the future.

If we are to correspond with the grace which we have been asking of God, we must make resolutions which will help us to do so. These should not be mere generalities; they must be practical, and directed towards the maintaining of real effort and the overcoming of those obstacles which we know by experi-

ence to beset us ; and above all, they must be made with distrust of ourselves and trust in God.

III

Three things devolve upon us at the conclusion of the meditation :—

1. We must thank God for the help which He has vouchsafed to us during it.

2. We must ask His pardon for whatever has been faulty or imperfect therein.

3. We must pray Him to bless our resolution, our life, our death, and the day which we are entering upon.

We must then make a "spiritual nosegay."

For this we should gather up some holy thoughts or aspirations which have been the fruit of our meditation, that we may breathe their fragrance throughout the day. Lastly, we should offer our meditation and our good resolution to Our Blessed Lady, asking her to take us under her protection, and to pray for us through the coming day and at the hour of our death.

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